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“Fatherhood isn’t easy like motherhood”:
Representing Fatherhood and the Nuclear Family on
Popular Television.

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Abstract:

This thesis investigates the way in which tensions between the discursive dominance of the nuclear model and an acknowledgement of the plurality of family forms has been embodied in popular representations of fatherhood.

Based on assumptions of gendered spheres of experience that define the domestic sphere as primarily 'feminine', fathers occupy an uncertain position within the discourse of the nuclear family. It is this ambiguous position, when contrasted with an assumption of their ultimate dominance, which creates confusion between the symbolic figure of the absent patriarch and the literal presence of the father within family life.

Television, in particular, has regularly been forced to confront this dynamic between discursive absence and literal presence, due to the centrality of the nuclear family in both the commissioning and scheduling of programmes. Television's representation of fatherhood regularly re-asserts or undermines patriarchal privilege by representing the father as a threat to the coherence of the family unit or as an overgrown adolescent who ultimately acquiesces to the 'natural' domestic authority of the female. In this way, popular television is able to continue restating a model of the patriarchal nuclear family, while simultaneously acknowledging its contested status as a norm of family life. As highly negotiated attempts to move beyond these common models have proven, however, this approach threatens to replicate a limited discourse of family life through incorporating variation into a single model, rather than broadening available representations.

Through an analysis of the representation of fatherhood in the domestic comedy, this thesis begins by investigating the genre's ability to invert traditional power relationships, allowing it to explore the limits of representing a coherent model of the nuclear family. Progressing to an analysis of the representation of fatherhood in television advertising, it goes on to examine the relationship between an acknowledgement of these limitations and idealised representations of family life within consumer culture. Incorporating a close reading of the 'Adam' series of adverts for British Telecom, their representation of a non-nuclear family unit and the role of the father within this unit, this work also considers the potential challenges and rewards of representing alternative models. Exploring both popular and academic discourses of family life throughout, this thesis concludes with a discussion of the possibility of imagining new forms of family that successfully include the father, and the threat to this process posed by their current incorporation into pre-existing representational models.

Declaration

I, Jack Burton, declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

This work was done wholly while in candidature for a research degree at this University.

I have clearly attributed where I have consulted the published work of others. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given.

None of this work has been published prior to submission.

Signed:

Date:

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Introduction

For those rehearsing the well worn arguments that a ‘traditional’, nuclear form of family life is under threat from an increasing acceptance of alternative models, the changing place of the father within family life has become the subject of essential debate. Yet, the very idea that the processes of fathering and the cultural identity of fatherhood has changed arguably assumes a static core, an ontology, of fatherhood, against which these changes can be measured and understood.

The loose coalition of texts from a range of disciplines focusing on fatherhood, and forming a field of Fatherhood Studies, may be a reflection of a sociological and cultural focus on both gender and family life that is a relatively recent phenomenon within academia. Even a brief overview of these texts, however, paints a picture of both the constantly shifting parameters of fatherhood as a concept, the variety of identities that this broader concept encompasses, and the regularity with which these have been the focus of debate. In short, working out the role of fathers within childrearing and family life is an intellectual and philosophical pursuit with a history that reaches back beyond the patriarchal, nuclear model of family life that arguably continues to dominate contemporary discourse on the subject.

In psychology, for example, parallels are drawn between the modern and ancient worlds, seeming to find precedents for the ways in which fatherhood within the nuclear family can be understood. The Freudian Oedipus complex is perhaps the most famous of these parallels, suggesting both the necessity of a two-parent heterosexual relationship for the reproduction of this heterosexual coupling in the next generation, and the ambiguous place that the father holds within this process. This

appeal to classical myth as the formation of our contemporary notions of fatherhood runs through the discipline, however, extending beyond Freud. Jungian theorist, Luigi Zoja, in an ambitious interdisciplinary overview of both psychological and cultural perspectives on fatherhood, suggests that:

“...the underlying image of the father in the western world was profoundly shaped by Greek myth and Roman law, even if it was later modified by the advent of Christianity, and then by the French and industrial revolutions. The changes which have occurred in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s are surely important; but they are also the crests of froth on the great ground-swell of history.” (Zoja, 2001, p.9)

While Zoja’s study offers a broad historical perspective, placing the rhetoric of change within its broader context, it is important to recognise the distinction between his project, working within psychology, and many other studies on fatherhood. As his use of the word “image” makes clear, Zoja joins Freud in focusing primarily on the symbolic role of the father, investigating the way in which this symbolic role affects the ability of individual men to interact with their child. He calls this the “paradox of the father”, which he describes as follows:

“The degree to which a mother fulfils her role is generally measured on the basis of how she interacts with her child: the challenge, surely, is great, but clear and identifiable. The father’s situation is different: in addition to depending on how he interacts with his child, his success *as a father* also depends on how he interacts with society, and the laws that hold in these two different spheres are not the same” (Zoja, 2001, p.5)

It is this imperfect distinction between the increasing discursive presence of fatherhood in literature on the family and the assumption of absence that primarily defines the role of patriarch that structures much of the discourse of fatherhood. This duality of roles, these paradoxical expectations of presence and absence, not only continue to characterise fatherhood as the contested discursive formation that it always has been, but also create new complexities as this distinction becomes ever more apparent. Without a primary, coherent model of fatherhood against which to

judge alternatives it becomes impossible to create a picture of stasis or change. Yet the nature of the patriarchal power with which this model of fatherhood is at least partially imbued questions one of the foundations of our patriarchal society. Any attempt to resolve the “paradox of the father”, such as a complete rejection of the patriarch of the symbolic realm in favour of a focus on fatherhood as a multiplicity of subjectivities and experiences, threatens to dismantle this foundation, on which more than this singular discourse has been built.

This is why fatherhood has been debated with such passion over recent years. While the parallels that are drawn between the ancient and contemporary contexts in psychology, or the myriad moments of anxiety surrounding the role of fatherhood that demonstrate a precedent for this passionate debate in historical analyses of the role (Griswold, 1993; La Rossa, 1997; Tosh, 1999) suggest the sustained anxieties surrounding fatherhood. The acknowledgement of this precedent within academic discourse forms part of a wider movement towards questioning the gendered assumptions that underpin human society. While Zoja is right to remind us that this movement forms part of a greater “ground-swell of history”, the changes that he notes as occurring throughout the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s suggest that this swell has built to a crescendo, allowing an increasing array of work on fatherhood, including his own, to gain increasing academic currency.

The extended process of change that Zoja seems to be alluding to coincides with the growth of feminism, women’s studies, Masculinity Studies and Gender Studies as interwoven disciplines concerned with the gendered nature of society. Themselves a highly gendered set of processes and identities, fathering and fatherhood have become an increasingly common subject for these disciplines as they have grown. Feminism’s concern with the patriarchal nature of society, for example,

means that it must intrinsically grapple with the position of masculine subjectivities, including fatherhood, in the exercising of this patriarchal power.

As we shall, in a more detailed overview of the way in which both masculinity and Fatherhood Studies grew out of feminism's increasing influence on academic discourse, the complex relationship between men and patriarchy continues to define the parameters of debate. When feminist analysis turned its attention to the role that motherhood played in defining what it meant to be a woman, it did so to expose the way in which the integration of motherhood and concepts of femininity potentially limited women by confining them to the domestic sphere, primary site of the family's enactment. The work of Nancy Chodorow (1978), Dorothy Dinnerstein (1991) and Adrienne Rich (1977), amongst others, built both on previous analysis of the nuclear family to investigate the way in which the increasing separation of the domestic and economic spheres, and their subsequent gendering as either primarily masculine or feminine, helped to reproduce a patriarchal societal structure through the reproduction of these gendered assumptions in subsequent generations. By critiquing the idea of motherhood as being an innate to women, and proposing its constructed nature, these analyses opened up the possibility of constructing alternative models of parenting that could lead to a more equitable society.

While specific works on fatherhood gradually began to appear in the wake of these influential theories, providing the necessary inverse analysis, an awareness of the constructed nature of fatherhood, and by extension patriarchy, had inevitably underpinned the feminist analysis that had preceded them. In *The Second Sex*, for example, Simone De Beauvoir outlines a theory of the way in which the organisation of the family changed after the awareness of the male's role in procreation, based on evidence drawn from a the variety of social sciences that were gaining increased

currency during the time in which she was writing. She contrasts the socially constructed nature of fatherhood with the more biologically 'innate' processes of motherhood. Adrienne Rich (1977) draws upon this same theoretical foundation in her discussion of the differences between the experience and institution of motherhood to question this 'innateness'. The irony of her analysis may well be that in attempting to question the 'innateness' of motherhood she inadvertently reifies a singular model of fatherhood against which motherhood's 'naturalness' has been traditionally contrasted. While this line of thinking follows De Beauvoir in suggesting that the constructed nature of fatherhood is one of the primary foundations of a patriarchal society, as we shall see, it is often assumed in these arguments that a single, monolithic notion of dominant, patriarchal fatherhood is produced as the end result of this process of construction.

As the field of Fatherhood Studies began to include research from a range of human-centred social sciences, such as sociology and anthropology, it soon became clear that a singular model could not possibly encompass all the permutations of the father that these studies were identifying. While a more varied picture of fathers and fathering began to become apparent, this change was still often understood in relation to the singular model of patriarchal fatherhood that had set the parameters of the early debate. The rhetoric of a fatherhood in 'crisis', with both the literal and symbolic absence of fatherhood being conflated into a convenient whole, has been a common characteristic of the discourse of fatherhood throughout the 20th century, and continuing into the 21st.

In America particularly, where a nostalgic ideal of nuclear family life seems to retain a great degree of mythical resilience, conservative commentators on the family have figured father absence as a primary cause of both the demographic and cultural

breakdown of this ideal. David Blankenhorn's *Fatherless America* (1995) and David Popenoe's *Life Without Father* (1996) both present ranging arguments which draw together strands of thought in biology, sociology, politics and culture to present the idea of a decrease in the literal involvement of individual men in the process of childrearing and the cultural importance of the *idea* fatherhood, with what they see as almost exclusively negative consequences for society.

As Popenoe's acknowledgement of what he calls "the fatherhood problem" (1996, p.4) makes clear, however, while he makes appeal to the 1990s as a particular historical moment in which fatherhood is considered less essential than ever before, he also acknowledges the tension that has always characterised the role of the father throughout history. He draws a distinction between the more involved biological processes of childbirth and childrearing for women and the distancing effect that this can have on men:

"...being a father is universally problematic for men and for their societies in a way that being a mother is not. While most mothers the world over bear and nurture their young with an intrinsic acknowledgement and, most commonly, acceptance of their role, taking on the role of the father is often filled with conflict, tension, distance, and doubt." (Popenoe, 1996, p.4)

Here, Popenoe follows Chodorow, Dinnerstein and Rich in identifying the biological differences between men and women's role in childrearing as the defining factor behind the relative importance afforded motherhood and fatherhood in this process. Equally, all four identify this disparity as having an effect on the construction of society, rather than simply a psychological effect on individual children, and the radical effect that changing this division of labour would have on this construction. Feminist analysis may see changing these assumptions as one of the primary ways in which the patriarchal aspects of society can be confronted, resolving the tensions of fatherhood by more thoroughly integrating men into the processes of childrearing. In

Popenoe's account, however, challenges to this patriarchal model have led to a further removal of men from these processes, rather than a more thorough integration, thus creating an even greater degree of tension around the role of the father in both childrearing and in society more generally. In short, the continuing conflation of the literal role of the father in these processes and the symbolic role of the father in the exercising of patriarchy means that attempting to dismantle the patriarchal model has led to an absence of literal fathers to accompany the assumption of absence that has long been a defining characteristic of the role.

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Are Popenoe and Blankenhorn right to argue that fathers are absent from both daily life and discourse in contemporary Western societies, however? The question is a complex one as it requires drawing together work from a range of disciplines, each of which is in thrall to its own set of received assumptions. While it is important to situate all studies of fatherhood within a broader historical picture of change within family life, the sheer range of studies that have drawn a distinction between a seemingly coherent notion of fatherhood and the changes that have been wrought on this notion in the context of postwar Europe and America do suggest a steady picture of short term change at least. While closer analysis in the early chapters of this thesis will attempt to unpack the overarching effect that the assumption of nuclear family living has had on the creation of a contemporary discourse of family life, even within the relatively short history of this specific discourse it is apparent that change rather than stasis has been revealed by the scrutiny under which the family has been placed.

For fathers and fatherhood, it seems that Popenoe might be right in suggesting that the changes to the nuclear family model which dominate the discourse may be

defined by their increasing literal and discursive absence. By all reasonable estimates, the number of fathers who do not live with their children has greatly increased since the 1970s, in the UK as much as in the US. Bradshaw *et al* (1999, p.2) suggest that, “The number of fathers who are non-resident [in the UK] has increased very rapidly in the 1980s, and especially the 1990s, and is still increasing”, citing estimates that the number of lone parent families has increased from 0.57 million in 1971 to 1.6 million in 1996, with only 4% of these lone parent families being headed by men (Bradshaw *et al*, 1999, p.5). Brid Featherstone suggests that this trend continued into the 2000s with the number of families headed by a lone mother increasing to 2.3million by 2004 (Featherstone, 2009, p. 19). The picture looks strikingly similar in the US, with 30.7% of children under the age of 17 residing in single parent families by the year 2000, 80% in turn of which were headed by a single mother (Pasley and Braver, 2004, p.217).

Of course, while these seemingly bleak statistics potentially underpin the argument that fathers are more “absent” than ever before, what they actually refer to is a specific type of absenteeism, namely from the domestic sphere. Due to the intimate connection between the domestic sphere and the nuclear family form, the father’s absence from it can often be extrapolated to conclude that they are absent from family life entirely. As the large amounts of work that have sprung up investigating diverse forms of fatherhood make clear, however, this is not necessarily the case. There are an increasing number of step-families, for instance, meaning that, while children may not be living with their biological father, they may, in fact, have a father-figure in the house. As the “fastest growing family type” in the UK (Stanley and Gamble, 2005, p.6), the biological functionalism of the nuclear family has been consistently challenged and new models of fathering have been formed around these

non-biological relationships. Equally, the increasing concern with the permutations of a non-nuclear concept of fathering has seen work done on lone fathering (Rosenthal and Keshet, 1981; Greif, 1985; Barker, 1994) and fathering after divorce (Arendell, 1995), which demonstrates the wide variety of experiences that currently challenge a monolithic notion of fatherhood as either nuclear, and thus integrated into the domestic sphere (albeit primarily *as* an absence), or non-nuclear, and thus absent from it entirely.

Ironically, unlike the assumption of absence which we shall see traditionally underpins the father's place within the nuclear family set up, the increased literal absence of fathers from the domestic sphere has in no way bolstered that model as the defining concept of fatherhood in contemporary discourse on the family. In fact, fatherhood has become more and more present in both discourse, and potentially in reality, as expectations of what the role entails have shifted. This discursive double movement will be investigated in more detail later, as broader changes in the way in which both families and fatherhood have been conceived are considered. What becomes apparent from even a brief overview of the burgeoning literature on fatherhood, however, is that the dominant assumption of fatherhood as either partially absent (in the nuclear model) or permanently absent (from the domestic sphere) has not led to an equivalent absence from discourse. While a great deal of this discourse follows Popenoe and Blankenhorn in factoring in fatherhood *as* an absence, this argument is itself complicated by the increasing focus on the subject within academic and popular discourse. It may have been possible for pioneering work on the perceived "decline of fatherhood", such as that undertaken by Maureen Green in 1976, to suggest that "no one is taking any notice of father...as a topic, as a subject for research and conjecture by sociologists, by revolutionaries and journalists, father

is forgotten.” (Green, 1976, p.1). Equally, Brian Jackson begins his 1983 study of fatherhood by suggesting that “what becomes immediately obvious is that we know very little about fathers” (Jackson, 1983, p.3). By the 1990s, which we shall see also marks something of a watershed for the appearance of sustained academic analysis of masculinity in general and was also concurrent with a popular rhetoric of crisis surrounding the broader subject, it would be impossible for anyone working in the field to make such claims.

In fact, we perhaps know more about fatherhood, fathers and fathering now than ever before. By the 1990s, and continuing into the 2000s, a steady stream of work had appeared that drew together the previously disparate strands of work on fatherhood within psychoanalysis (Pirani, 1988; Zorja, 2001; Trowell and Etchegoyen, 2002) and psychology more generally (Beail And McGuire, 1982); in history (Griswold, 1993; La Rossa, 1997; Broughton and Rodgers, 2007); in philosophy (Nease and Austin, 2010); and in anthropology (Hewlett, 1992), to be placed under the evolving interdisciplinary banner of Fatherhood Studies. Extensive work has also been undertaken in sociology to understand the changing role of the father and has regularly paid attention to the interactions between disciplines which is necessary to create a nuanced picture of fatherhood and fathering as both lived experience and as symbolic role. A selection of this work has been regularly and thoughtfully reflected in each subsequent edition of Michael Lamb’s highly influential and comprehensive *The Role of the Father in Child Development*, originally published in 1976 and reaching its 5th edition in 2010. In the seeming absence of the appearance of academic ‘readers’ that both signify and solidify the parameters of an accepted academic discipline, the continual development of Lamb’s volume perhaps best reflects the ongoing and expanding research interest in the subject of fatherhood and

yet the difficulty of establishing a coherent field that deals with the complexities that define it.

Esther Dermott confronts these complexities head on in *Intimate Fatherhood* (2008), drawing distinctions between the different aspects of the subject that have often required the adoption of a multi-disciplinary approach to be fully understood. She begins by following David Morgan in drawing a distinction between fatherhood, fathering and fathers; suggesting that ‘fatherhood’ refers to

“the public meanings associated with being a father”, ‘fathering’ to “the actual practice of ‘doing’ parenting”, and ‘father(s)’ to “the connection between a particular child and a particular man (whether biological or social)”
(Dermott, 2008, p.8)

She then goes on to discuss the way in which work that has attempted to unpack the meaning and development of all three of these distinctive permutations, she argues, has been faced with the need to account for three substantial difficulties, which in an echo of Zorja’s vocabulary, she terms the “the paradoxes of contemporary fatherhood” (2008, p.8).

The first, which she characterises as “attention and absence”, is perhaps the one with the most impact on this thesis, citing, as she does, the seeming paradox that the assumption of both literal and symbolic absence of fatherhood that underpins a rhetoric of ‘crisis’ is accompanied by the increasing discursive visibility of all three permutations; fatherhood, fathering and fathers. The second, termed “creation and construction” suggests that the core of the common definition of fatherhood remains the biological act of procreation, but this is complicated by the increasing currency of an idea of fatherhood as socially constructed. This paradox is perhaps succinctly exhibited by the work of Andrea Doucet, whose *Do Men Mother?* (2006), once again attempts to break this biological functionalist link between femininity and childrearing by investigating the experience of stay-at home dads and single fathers.

As the title of her book suggests, however, the paradox of “creation and construction” is potentially avoided by recreating the binary of ‘mothering’ as nurture and ‘fathering’ as economic provision. While this binary may be de-gendered in Doucet’s valuable work, it ultimately remains, thus men are incorporated into a idea of ‘mothering’ rather than focusing on the way in which a new model of ‘fathering’ can incorporate nurture into itself. This is not to disparage Doucet’s work; it is simply to join Dermott in recognising that it exists within a discourse with this paradox at its core. The third paradox, which Dermott terms “culture and conduct”, follows La Rossa (1997) in suggesting that while,

“...cultural representations of fatherhood suggest a new model of ever increasing involvement and a move towards equal parenthood, the conduct of fathers suggests much less change in men’s activities and an obvious continuing division of labour between fathers and mothers” (Dermott, 2008. p.7)

Finally, Dermott suggests that the root of these paradoxes may extend from a fundamental question that it is valuable to ask about the motivations of studying ‘fatherhood’ as an overarching object, rather than sticking to the empirical analysis of specific, and multiple, forms of fatherhood, fathering and fathers:

“...given the acknowledgement that the social contexts in which fathering occurs and the routes to fatherhood are manifold, resulting in significant diversity in men’s experiences of fatherhood, why there is still a concern to conceptualise contemporary fatherhood as one entity” (2008, p.8)

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Yet, as the title of this thesis implies, despite its potentially paradoxical and contested nature, an overarching discourse of fatherhood as a singular entity seems to endure, if only as a point of reference against which deviation can be judged.

Homer Simpson’s casual, and ironically humorous, distinction between ‘easy’ motherhood and a presumably ‘difficult’ fatherhood is typical of the intelligence of

The Simpsons' in that it reveals multiple truths about contemporary discourses of parenting in a single line. His assertion is patently humorous, particularly considering the disparity that the show exhibits between his neglectful, selfish and impulsive approach to fathering, which regularly sees him forget how many children he has or their individual names, and his wife Marge's usually selfless devotion to her family. As an analysis of the character, and his place within the history of the domestic sitcom will later reveal, however, the joke also potentially hints at the tensions in discourses of fatherhood that do make it an arguably more 'difficult' proposition in terms of encompassing and maintaining a coherent identity or set of practices. While the psychological effects of Marge's position as the nurturing parent and dutiful wife is also regularly questioned in *The Simpsons*, echoing feminist arguments that the seemingly coherent nature of motherhood places limits on aspects of female identity, her integrated position within the family is rarely in doubt.

The extreme, buffoonish nature of Homer, so often the motivator of adventure and action, however, regularly jeopardises his position within the family. As his emergence as the series' defining character suggests, however, it may well be his antagonistic position in relation to his family (as well as many other interlinked aspects of his life, such as work, money and health) that makes him such an enduring, and endearing, character. As an incompetent and often unwilling representative of a nuclear, patriarchal masculinity that arguably comes closest to defining the singular entity of fatherhood which Dermott questions as the core concern of academic discourses on the subject, Homer also represents the impossibility of retaining this singular entity within popular culture.

Popular cultural representations of fatherhood belong most obviously to the symbolic realm in which, as we shall see, the patriarchal model of the nuclear family,

with an accompanying model of absent, patriarchal fatherhood, continue to define the parameters of debate, even if only as a reference point against which alternative permutations can be understood. This model is arguably even more central to the medium of television due to the assumptions of a nuclear family audience which it has been argued have shaped commissioning and scheduling from its inception (Ang, 1996, p.23) due to its primary site of consumption, the domestic sphere, primarily site of the enactment and understanding of family life. While changes in the way that fatherhood has been represented can, and have, been explored in alternative mediums, such as film (Bruzzi, 2005) and literature (Shideler, 1999), demonstrating the constant process of flux and the tensions which have characterised representations of fatherhood from the end of the 19th century onwards, television offers a unique opportunity to investigate the way in which the family, and the position of fatherhood within it, have been represented back to itself. The meteoric rise of television's popularity in the 1950s also intimately ties it to the history of the nuclear family, which both demographically and culturally dominated the decade due to the postwar 'baby boom', thus offering the chance to chart the ways in which the substantial challenges to this monolithic discourse of family and fatherhood that have arisen in the subsequent decades have been represented.

While the central place that the nuclear family occupies in relation to the medium means that the patriarchal nuclear model has arguably proven more resilient on the small screen than it has in other aspects of discourse, it has in no way remained immune to the discursive shifts that have seen increasing scrutiny of role of fatherhood in childrearing. While Dermott, following La Rossa, suggests that the "culture and conduct" paradox of fatherhood has seen representations of a more involved model of fatherhood grow while actual proof of increased father

involvement at home has been hard to find, the inverse is arguably true of television. While an increasing plurality of fatherhood models, including absent and divorced fatherhood, has begun to shape academic and political debate on the subject, there appears to be something of a 'culture lag' when it comes to representing this plurality on television. While the wider debate about the place of fatherhood, regardless of the paradoxical confusion between the present nature of new, involved models of fatherhood and the absent nature of previous patriarchal models, rumbled on, the basic structure of the patriarchal, nuclear model still arguably defines the television family.

That is not to say that televisual representations of fatherhood have been immune to these discursive changes. In fact, many of the most beloved shows and characters have made room for a consideration of the increasing complexities of fatherhood, as Homer Simpson demonstrates. A singular notion of fatherhood may be more identifiable within the realm of televisual representation, namely a nuclear model of fatherhood, but the seeming coherence of this primary model of fatherhood is regularly questioned through the complex position that he holds in relation to the family. Once again, the paradoxical nature of fatherhood suggests that this is something of an inevitability, as it has been in the broader discourse of family and fatherhood. The patriarchal, nuclear model may still be the closest thing there is to a singular entity through which fatherhood is understood, which Dermott suggests as the potentially paradoxical goal of almost all research on the subject. It is clear, however, that integrating a model based on absence into the domestic sphere, with which it is intimately associated, immediately complicates this singular entity. The domestic sphere is not the province of the nuclear father, whose patriarchal power is primarily based on his absence from this sphere. Representing fatherhood within that

sphere, therefore, must necessarily account for this paradox, even as it reproduces the model of family life most readily recognisable as ‘normal’ and ‘desirable’.

This is where the domestic situation comedy, with its narrowed focus on the interactions between family members as a narrative motivation offers a unique opportunity within broader televisual discourse to observe that ways that this tension has been integrated. While soap operas may often place family relationships at the centre of their narratives for example, they are also characterised by conflict, which makes deviation from this norm a regular motivator of action. Equally, while documentaries focusing on family life, such as the highly influential *The Family* (1974) may once again have arguably privileged a particular form in the shape of the nuclear model, its claim to represent a ‘reality’ of family life complicates its place within the discourse of family life through its reactive rather than active posture in relation to change within this discourse.

While these permutations of the television family, amongst many others, potentially suggest the difficulty of pinning down the way in which fatherhood and family have been represented, difficult decisions must necessarily be made if an object of study that is in any way manageable, or meaningful, is to be defined. As this thesis is an attempt to engage with a broader discourse on the family and fatherhood, combining both broader discursive and specific textual analysis to create an argument about the evolving place of fatherhood within the nuclear model dominated discourse of the family, certain obvious parameters immediately present themselves.

The most important of these is that the focus throughout is essentially limited to the way in which the nuclear family model has been both privileged and challenged in the 20th and 21st century discourse of the family. Just as Fatherhood Studies strives to define a singular model through which to understand its subject, I argue that the

overarching discourse of family life has used the singular model of the nuclear family as the base state from which deviation has been measured. In discussing how this discourse of ‘the family’, as a coherent concept conflated with the nuclear model, developed and sustained itself, we must pay heed to an increasing awareness of pluralism while also demonstrating how this apparent pluralism is understood only in relation to this dominant model. Part of the object of this study, therefore, is not to ‘prove’ the diversity present in family life through appeal to empirical evidence, but to highlight the reciprocal nature of the relationship between such empirical work and the cultural discourse of family life which they produce and are produced by.

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Chapter 1 begins with an overview of the way in which the contemporary field of Fatherhood Studies has been shaped by the increasing attention paid to the gendered nature of society brought about by the political and philosophical analysis of gender extending from feminist debates. The way in which we have grown to understand the varying subjectivities of men and women through an appeal to the notion of masculinity and femininity as flexible, and constructed, gender identities, inflects each element of our gendered society. By understanding the growth of this discourse of constructed gender, the “paradoxes of fatherhood” reveal themselves as the inevitable result of attempting to theorise, and critique, the most literally patriarchal form of masculinity, forming the basis of a patriarchal society. By questioning the position of the patriarch, which relies on the complex interplay between patriarchy, fatherhood and masculinity as discursive concepts and men and fathers as organising categories, discourses of gender must necessarily grapple with the difficulty of rethinking the meaning of subject positions which have traditionally

provided the universal position against which alternative subject positions have been understood. Michael Kimmel's useful concept of a 'superordinate' masculinity proves particularly useful here:

“...the superordinate is usually hypervisible as an individual; indeed to be a straight white man is to embody exactly what an “individual” is. As a result, one is invisible as a member of a group; one rarely considers race, gender or sexuality if you are a member of the dominant group.” (2005, p.x)

An exploration of development of the field of Masculinity Studies, and Fatherhood Studies as an accompanying field that confronts a primarily masculine identity, reveals that they have coalesced around two broad approaches. One is an increasing exploration of the plurality of forms that 'masculinity' encompasses, culminating in the suggestion that it is more useful to conceive of multiple masculinities rather than a singular entity (Connell, 1995) and the other is the idea of a 'crisis' within masculinity that is reflective of the threat that this plurality poses to this previously dominant singular entity. While it is tempting to see one as broadly progressive and one as regressive, the rhetoric of 'crisis' does not necessarily reflect a desire to return to a singular ideal of patriarchal masculinity. While this desire does characterise some work in the field, the broader argument raises valid questions about the difficulty of creating alternative subject positions that are not based on dominance within a discourse of masculinity that has always been defined *by* this dominance. By turning the 'superordinate' from 'hypervisible' to simply 'visible', it intrinsically questions the very existence of this identity through inserting it into discourse.

The same process is then identified as characterising the creation of a coherent notion of family life based around the nuclear model. By investigating an increased discursive focus on the family as a result of the growth of human sciences, such as anthropology, sociology, psychology and history, within the academy, Chapter 2 discusses the similar movement of the nuclear model, as the 'superordinate' form of

family life within Western culture, from being ‘hypervisible’ to being visible. By then demonstrating how this increased visibility led to the possibility of critiquing this model, and to the possibility of conceiving of alternative family forms, I conclude that the increased presence of the dominance of the nuclear model within discourses of family life can be understood as both a cause, and a consequence, of an increasing acknowledgment of its fragility as a coherent concept through which the family can be understood.

A more detailed investigation of the position of fatherhood within this discourse of the nuclear family follows in Chapter 3. By examining the way in which fatherhood has been conceived as a ‘social construction’, as opposed to the often assumed biological ‘innateness’ of motherhood, it is argued that fatherhood as a concept, fathers as individuals and fathering as a series of processes, have always held an uncertain position within the discourse of the nuclear family. The complex relationship between the nuclear family model and the processes of industrialisation, with which it is often associated, creates a discourse of separate spheres of experience for men and for women which removes the father from the home. The tension between this assumption of absence, and the paradoxical need to account for the presence of fathers within a growing discourse of family life, characterises the way in which fatherhood has been dealt with in the discourse of the nuclear family. Challenges to the nuclear model appeared which questioned this distinction between fatherhood as a social construction and motherhood as an innate biological process (Rich, 1977; Chodorow, 1978), recognising the relationship between this discourse of parenting and the reproduction of patriarchy. By inserting an analysis of fatherhood into discourse, however, the absence from the domestic sphere and the discursive silence, on which patriarchal dominance are based, found themselves consistently

challenged. Coinciding with, and commenting on, broader discursive and social changes, therefore, the growth of a varying discourse on fathers and fathering challenged the very meaning of fatherhood as a coherent concept and, therefore, the patriarchal assumptions on which the nuclear family relies for its survival. The imperfect distinction between fathers, fathering and fatherhood that Esther Dermott recognises, however, means that the first two have long been defined by their interaction with the third, broader concept. Within the realm of discourse, therefore, there remains confusion between the symbolic function of the patriarch and the literal processes of parenting, reflected in the way in which fatherhood has been conceived as being problematic within the discourse of the nuclear family.

As Chapter 4 demonstrates, this confusion is even more apparent within the symbolic realm of culture, where the patriarchal model of the nuclear family has reflected the dominance of the form within the broader discourse. By investigating the various ways in which fathers have embodied tension within the domestic situation comedy, from the 1950s to the present day, we see a concurrent awareness of its contested position within the nuclear family that reflects its position within discourse of the nuclear family more generally. By focusing on the way in which situation comedies have confronted the paradox of a fatherhood based on absence from the domestic sphere with the increasing discursive presence of fathers within that sphere, it is argued that situation comedy has centralised these tensions within its representation of fatherhood throughout the medium's history. By tracing the development of the father within the domestic situation comedy, it becomes apparent that the figure of the father has been used to embody the tension between the symbolic patriarch, of which they are inevitably an example, and the increasing plurality of fathers and fathering, which they also reflect. I also discuss the way in

which patriarchal dominance within the family has been questioned, by the increasing presence of 'non-traditional' forms of fatherhood defined by their oppositional relationship to the dominant form in terms of race, gender or class, or through their characterisation as infantile or incapable. The comedic impulse of situation comedy allows for an inversion of these traditional power structures. It is this possibility of inversion that makes them such an interesting example of the way in which the confusion between the patriarch and the father has been confronted on television, as it creates a space in which the status quo can be routinely questioned while also being restored at the end of a self-contained narrative. The arguable removal of the necessity for characters to grow and change to any great degree for these programmes to work, means that taking notice of the way in which long-running programmes have dramatised broader debates about fatherhood reveal the fluctuations in literal fathering within each episode, while the underlying consistency of these characters comments on a broader, general concept of fatherhood in the culture in which they were produced.

As we turn to a discussion of fatherhood within television advertising in Chapter 5, it becomes apparent that representations of fatherhood within popular culture have long reflected its uncertain position within the nuclear model, rather than bolstering a coherent notion of patriarchal masculinity through increasing its discursive visibility. If, as Tony Chapman suggests, the meaning of family life has been altered by its separation from industrial processes, figuring it more as a unit of consumption than of production (2004, p.22), then one might assume that a medium so intimately associated with the maintenance of consumer culture might be expected to present a model of coherent nuclear family living. As an exploration of the development of one of the earliest, and most successful, models of domestic life

presented in British television advertising, namely the first advert produced for the stock cube brand OXO featuring Katie and Philip, demonstrates, however, advertising remained no more immune to the complexities of factoring masculinity into the domestic sphere than did the programmes it funded. Analysing the way in which OXO's continued focus on the family within its advertising developed these tensions to present an image of incompetent masculinity suggests a similar acknowledgement of the paradoxical need to demonstrate fathers within the domestic sphere and account for patriarchal dominance dependent on their absence from it. Finishing with an extended discussion of the *Adam* (2001-) series of BT adverts, this chapter then goes onto to discuss the way in which alternative family forms have begun to be presented within the medium. This series demonstrates the reproduction of previous notions of fatherhood within the domestic sphere through the representation of Adam/ as both incompetent and uneasy. By offering a flattering comparison with an incapable biological father and a narrative of growth for the character, however, we also see how this series uses the 'alternative' family form that it presents to suggest the possibility of creating non-patriarchal forms of fatherhood fully integrated within the domestic sphere.

Concluding with a discussion of the relationship between the broader discourse of family and fatherhood and its cultural representations, this thesis looks to the Foucauldian model of discourse to demonstrate that the increased visibility of fatherhood has helped to restructure its meaning. While a monolithic notion of fatherhood that Homer Simpson suggests is "not easy", persists in the contested discourse of a patriarchal model that has characterised fatherhood's paradoxical position within the discourse of the nuclear family, the very presence of this model within discourse has led to an increasing acknowledgement of the alternative

positions which can characterise the potentially plural identities of fathers and the diffuse processes of fathering. By distinguishing between the patriarch and the father, the 'reflux' movement that Foucault suggests is brought about by the increasing presence of forms which are 'peripheral' within the dominant discourse (1988, p.39), exposes the constructed nature of these dominant forms. In the case of the *Adam* series, therefore, its subsequent move towards the recreation of a nuclear form of family in later adverts may not herald a return to a singular model of family life. It may, instead, suggest, as does this thesis, that the relentless discursive focus on fatherhood and family has led to a blurring of the distinction between the periphery and the centre within the discourse of fatherhood.

1: The Paradoxes of Gender and the Discourse of Fatherhood

There can be little doubt that the position of fathers within British families has been placed under an ever-increasing degree of scrutiny over the previous three decades. Responding to feminist challenges to the patriarchal structure of the nuclear family model, and a more general focus on the way in which our lives are structured by gender, work has appeared in all disciplines that aims to analyse the effect that both the presence and absence of fathers has on the processes of family life.

These attempts to understand the place of the father within the family are far from empty intellectualising, however, responding, as they are, not only to the academic arguments that have arisen surrounding the father's role within the family but also responding to significant changes in the social and political realities (for want of a better word) of family life. There is often a disparity that much of this work reveals between the lived experience of fathering and the myths of a fatherhood based absence that we shall see arguably underpin the nuclear model. This arises from situating an ever shifting concept of fatherhood within the specifics of these different experiences, rather than reproducing a monolithic notion of fatherhood as a singular set of criteria.

Yet, it is possible to argue that this approach is, to some degree, a response to the same singular set of criteria that continue to provide an overarching model to be contested. Equally, it is all but impossible not to notice the continuing dominance of a similarly cohesive, broadly patriarchal model of fatherhood in popular culture. While the ever-expanding field of Fatherhood Studies contributes to a welcome expansion of what constitutes fathering, it often does so in response to a pre-existing model of

patriarchal fatherhood than continues to exert an influence by providing a reference point for a ‘myth’ of fatherhood in opposition to the present ‘reality’.

Take, for example, the increasingly common idea of the ‘situated’ nature of fatherhood and an awareness of the importance of the physical and social spaces in which it is enacted (Marsiglio *et al*, 2005; Aitken, 2009). This approach arguably foregrounds one of the core aspects of a traditional notion of patriarchal fatherhood, its absence from the prime cultural site in which the family is enacted, namely the domestic sphere, and makes a virtue of it through an analysis of fatherhood that does not simply see this removal from the domestic as a removal from the family as a whole.

Ironically, one of the key catalysts for this more nuanced study of fatherhood could be seen to be an emerging literature dealing with the absence of fathers, both figurative and literal, from the domestic sphere. “Absent” fatherhood, as defined by these narrow terms, underpins a range of studies that veer from the specific and highly literal examination of the increasing number of single parent, female-headed households, both in the UK and the USA (Barker, 1994), to explorations of the supposed erosion of patriarchal masculinity as a cultural myth, of the sort that underpinned the short lived mythopoetic men’s movement epitomised by the work of John Bly (1991).

While later chapters will attempt to unravel in greater detail the way in which these debates about fatherhood developed, focusing on placing this discourse into a broader historical perspective, it is useful at this point to examine some of the specific approaches to the study of fatherhood that constitute the field as it now stands. Equally, while the focus of this thesis is an attempt identify a set of discursive commonalities that combine to form the central spine of a discourse on fatherhood in

both academic and popular discourse, acknowledging the more specific areas of study that branch off from this central spine serves to repeatedly demonstrate its continued existence.

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Conceptualising Men and Patriarchy Within The Discourse Of Gender

As with the need of all disciplines to evolve from those that predated it, defining those works that exist within an established field of 'Fatherhood Studies', and those that deal with the same topic but exist outside of this specific field, is a potentially impossible task. Equally, establishing a workable timeline of the creation of a coherent field threatens to ignore this process of organic growth. In the case of fatherhood's entry into the academy, as an object of study, however, I would argue that it is possible to make a distinction between work concerned with fatherhood that postdates the entry of specifically gender related subjects, such as Women's Studies and Gender Studies, into the academy and work that may be concerned with the subject but exists within a broader field, such as psychology, sociology or history. This is not to say that the latter lacks depth or is superseded by the former, it is merely to suggest that the idea of Fatherhood Studies as any sort of coherent field would struggle to exist without the increased focus on gender that was primarily a result of the intertwined political goals of Women's Liberation and an increased academic acceptance of feminism.

As the first Women's Studies courses, and related permutations of that discipline, began to become established throughout the 1970s, it was somewhat inevitable that an increased attention paid to the gendered processes that underpinned our lives would eventually lead to the subject's gaze being turned upon men. At first,

this new focus generally found expression through feminist analysis of male dominance over women. As Lynn Segal suggests, however, there are potential problems with leaving it to one half of the gender divide to explain the underlying motivations of the other, leading to a multiplicity of essential questions about the exertion of masculine dominance but perhaps few answers:

“Debate and dispute among feminists seeking to understand men’s dominance have always revolved around whether it attaches to the inherent nature of males, to the instinctive attributes acquired by men through social conditioning, or to the diverse social structures and ideas through which men are invested with power and cultural pre-eminence. Many feminists simply equate ‘masculinity’ and ‘male dominance’.” (Segal, 1990, p.61)

Segal’s characterisation of the strong focus on masculine dominance that runs through much feminist analysis of masculinity is hardly surprising. The broadest political and social goals of feminism, to analyse and critique the power structures that lead to the almost universal domination of women by men, necessitates this focus on the way that power is exercised. The two broad camps that she also identifies, however, point towards the way in which the development of feminism as an academic discipline led, eventually, to an equivalent academic interest in masculinity as an object of study.

By drawing a distinction between ‘masculinity’, as an identity (or a set of identities), and ‘male dominance’ as the political and social structures that allow the dominance of men over women, Segal identifies a distinction that has helped to define the many directions that studies of men, following feminism, have explored as part of a burgeoning academic field.

The obvious need for an analysis of the political and social implications of the gendered structures that shape our world extends from the political goals of feminism. In this sense, key works that shaped many of the debates in what is now known as Second Wave Feminism focus on exploring the patriarchal structures that ensure male dominance. As Segal suggests, however, there is the possibility that this work

threatens to conflate the idea of a system that imposes male dominance with the psychology, and experience, of individual men. Bearing in mind feminism's central goals of achieving political and social equality for women, this potential conflation does not essentially threaten to undermine the broader arguments of these works. In Kate Millet's highly influential, and best selling, *Sexual Politics* (1977), for example, she focuses her subject on the bolstering of patriarchy through culture, in the form of literature, myth, religion and social convention. By focusing on how the sexual politics of patriarchy is arguably reflected and recreated through literature, however, Millet threatens to align her broader topic of patriarchy with that of male psychology, as expressed through the work of a handful of authors, in precisely the way Segal identifies. The analysis of patriarchy's foundations and implications that forms the second chapter of her book makes reference to a broad swath of underlying social and ideological structures that underpin the system as she sees it. From biological arguments centring on men's physical dominance of women, through societal structures, such as family and the state, Millet characterises her project in this chapter as describing "notes towards a theory of patriarchy" (Millet, 1977, p.24).

Millet's analysis makes reference to a great deal of the nuances that structured then current arguments about sex and gender, including critiquing the interchangeable nature of those terms and complicating the biological and social arguments for patriarchy. The structure of Millet's chapter implicitly presents a narrative of the continued recreation of a patriarchal system. She begins with 'Ideology', commenting that,

"Hannah Arendt has observed that government is upheld by power supported either through consent or through violence. Conditioning to an ideology amounts to the former. Sexual politics obtains consent through the 'socialization' of both sexes to patriarchal politics with regard to temperament, role and status." (1977, p.26)

The analysis of the more specific elements that continue to manufacture consent for this particular form of sexual politics are all seen to extend from an ideological basis. Her ensuing critique of biological, social or psychological arguments for patriarchy, for example, attempt to demonstrate the way in which ‘patriarchal politics’ are validated through an appeal to this ideological basis and this ideology is, in turn, reinforced through appeal to these systemic features that are actually its result.

The political impetus of Millet’s work characterises *Sexual Politics* as part of the now arguably historical Women’s Liberation movement. Reflecting on the continuing influence of the book after two decades, for example, Joseph Bristow suggests that *Sexual Politics*,

“...captures the atmosphere of what was right and what was wrong with radical feminism at its inception. The book has all the gusto of the Civil Rights Movement animating every page.” (1992, p.57).

Certainly, many of the central arguments that underpin *Sexual Politics* are familiar from a number of contemporaneous texts, all of which integrate patriarchy as a power structure that subjugates women. The hugely influential works of a range of thinkers from the Women’s Liberation movement focus on the inequalities of the patriarchal system for understandably political ends as a loose canon of key texts and ideas started to form around the increasing academic presence of gender that had produced *Sexual Politics*. Shulamith Firestone’s *The Dialectics of Sex: The Case For Feminist Revolution* (1971) for example, places the power relationship between the two sexes, and the possibility of reshaping it, at the heart of her analysis. Equally, the influential work of Juliet Mitchell, whose *Women’s Estate* (1971) and *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (1974), engage with, and occasionally critique, Millet’s arguments while also applying the author’s extensive knowledge of Marxist analyses of power structures to the unequal relationship between the sexes.

Sheila Rowbotham's *Women, Resistance and Revolution* (1972) and *Women's Consciousness, Man's World* (1973) are also heavily based in the theory and language of Marxism, partially aligning, as they do, the inequalities of a patriarchal system with the inequalities of the class dialectics of a capitalist system. In the introduction to the earlier of these two works, for example, Rowbotham goes as far as to suggest that it is:

“...only when women start to organize in large numbers that we become a political force, and begin to move towards the possibility of a truly democratic society in which every human being can be brave, responsible, thinking and diligent in the struggle to live at once freely and unselfishly. Such a democracy would be communism, and is beyond our present imagining.” (1972, p.13)

By equating the struggle for women's liberation from patriarchy with the dialectic struggle between the classes that underpins Marxist theory, Rowbotham uses the language of Marxism to outline a case for 'revolution' that will overthrow that traditional power structure. What this quote is also at pains to point out, however, is that, as with the ultimate goal of the socialist theory, the ideal is one that will reshape these dialectics for the benefit of every human being.

Unfortunately, the liberatory impulse of this historical moment, for men as well as women, did not seem to result in the same level of theoretical scrutiny being applied to both categories. As the title of Lynne Segal's *Slow Motion* (1990) implies, as does its position as part of a burgeoning literature focused on masculinity that finally began to flourish around the 1990s, the same level of rigorous analysis as applied to men took years, if not decades, to reach a similar position within the academy.

The language in which the parameters of the interwoven political, social and academic fields that could often be interchangeably referred to as feminism, Women's Liberation or Women's Studies, were set, may have a great deal to do with this.

Without wishing to present an erroneously narrow picture of such a vast field, there are certain identifiable complexities as regards the relationship of men to feminism that seem to have persisted, despite the variety of subjects and approaches that can be placed under this broad umbrella.

One obvious complication is the result of this dialectic conception of two distinct sexual categories engaged in an uneven power struggle. Primarily using the term 'sex' rather than 'gender', these influential works arguably reinstate the binary as they investigate it. Whereas the more flexible 'gender' allows for interactions and overlaps between the categories that mark them as inessential, 'sex' invariably refers to either male or female.

The political motivations behind this work go a long way to explaining this. Unlike the somewhat abstract philosophies of gender that perhaps characterise more contemporary academic approaches to the field, the concrete political goals of these texts may actually benefit from reinstating more rigid definitions of these categories. By recreating the dialectic struggle between men and women, as opposing groups, familiar from socialist theories of the power dynamics of class, the goal of these works is the liberation of one of these categories from the subservient position it occupies in relation to the other. As the term Women's Studies, of which these works provided some of the founding texts, also demonstrates, the aim of this burgeoning discipline was to place the focus on women. As a consequence, the average university library now contains shelves of books focusing on, and deconstructing, specific aspects of 'femininity', suggesting that they are not innate aspects of what it means to be a woman but are part of a 'sex role' that is constructed in response to that category's relationship with its Other, namely men.

This approach can be identified from the earliest work in the field, such as Betty Freidan's hugely influential and best selling *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), which critiques the concept of the housewife as an ideal of femininity. This combined with the author's key role in the creation of the National Organisation for Women in the United States has led to many heralding this book as a key catalyst for the popularisation of Second Wave Feminism. The same approach of deconstructing an apparently assumed norm of femininity was still paying intellectual, and literal, dividends for Naomi Wolf in 1990, however, when *The Beauty Myth* hit the bestseller lists, attacking the continued emphasis on a proscriptive ideal of appearance on an idea of femininity.

By interrogating the concept of 'femininity' and the organising category of 'woman', therefore, feminism intrinsically questioned the idea of an inherent, coherent idea of womanhood. Such an interrogation, by extension, would also seem to call for a questioning of the concept of 'masculinity' and the organising category of 'men', in opposition to which these ideals are defined. Yet, some have suggested that this questioning was slow to appear. Returning to Joseph Bristow's discussion of *Sexual Politics*, we see that he questions the ability of the oppositional politics of feminism to include fruitful discussion about, or with, men concerning their place within a patriarchal system. While he quite rightly admits that it would be "nonsense" to say that feminist critics have not engaged with masculinity he also discusses the way in which this work, of which *Sexual Politics* is his primary example, focuses on patriarchy as a system to the exclusion of a discussion of men as individuals or masculinities as a series of identities:

“Her (Millet’s) thesis was about patriarchy: an object of enquiry which has of necessity continued to feature centrally in feminist analysis. The trouble is that patriarchy describes not ‘gender’ as such but a material structure. Patriarchy pertains to the gendered regulation of production and reproduction, and, in the course of detailing the mechanisms- especially the institutions- through and in which men maintain power, the analysis of patriarchy seems, to this day, to leave masculinity behind as the uninterrogated premise upon which it must proceed.” (Bristow, 1992, p.61)

Here Bristow echoes Segal’s suggestion that the political motivations of much feminist literature led to them conflating the concepts of patriarchy and masculinity, resulting in an overarching, and nebulous, idea of ‘men’ being factored into the debate as the premise against which the position and construction of a female identity could be explored. In fact, I would argue that this is too simple an explanation of the deconstructive effect that both men and women’s entry into the discourse of feminism had on the “uninterrogated” nature of patriarchy’s premise. While Bristow may be right in suggesting that Millet’s subject is not ‘gender’ per se, the ‘material structure’ that she is investigating is itself intrinsically gendered. While her interrogation of patriarchy, when coupled with a focus on the psychological insights gleaned from the work of a selection of male authors, may suggest a link between some sort of intrinsic ‘maleness’ and patriarchy, men, and their fantasies of sex and power, remain at the centre of her analysis.

Neither is the book immune to the occasional, inevitable realisation that the patriarchal structure of society does not benefit all men equally. In her discussions of class and race, Millet acknowledges that “in a society where status is dependent upon the economic, social, and educational circumstances of class, it is possible for certain females to appear to stand higher than some males” (1977, p.36). Yet, she also discusses the way in which this can be undercut by an appeal to the cultural power of an ideal of ‘manhood’ that can assuage the potential insecurities of a “trucker or

butcher” who may feel threatened by the social status of someone from a traditionally lower caste, be they black or female (1977, p.36).

This astute investigation of the way in which different types of cultural and economic power can be wielded demonstrates the centrality of a more flexible idea of gendered identity to feminist debate, albeit not explicitly discussed in these now common terms. While the discourse of ‘sex’ may favour the idea of two distinct categories, ‘male’ and ‘female’, and the power relationships between the two, Millet’s work already demonstrates an awareness of the range of subject positions that can be adopted in relation to these two broad categories. By presenting an analysis of the patriarchal system, this type of feminist analysis does indeed interrogate both the prevalence of the system itself, and the assumptions of ‘maleness’ and ‘femaleness’ that underpin it. While the political motivations of this work tend to stress the coherence of the patriarchal system, thus paying less attention to the position of men’s relationship with it than to women’s relationship with it, that is not to say that through outlining the way in which the system works and proposing changes to it, feminist literature is not suggesting the possibility of individuals changing this relationship for themselves. As with the class based power analysis of Marxism, or the discourse of the civil rights movement, on which these works draw, they do attempt to analyse the concrete power relationships between individual groups, inevitably including analysis of the way in which power is wielded by individuals in those groups. Their ultimate goal, however, is to create a more equitable system for the benefit of all rather than the substitution of one imbalanced system for another through the retention of these rigid categories.

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Masculinities as an Object of Study

What is abundantly clear is that, while it may have been slower in appearing than one might have expected, a burgeoning discourse on masculinity did appear in both academic and popular discourse as a result of the focus on the gendered structure of society that was at the core of feminism. At first this discourse was mainly shaped around a response to the challenges of feminism, debating ways in which men could interact with a movement most commonly perceived as solely feminine and questioning the possibility of, and need for, masculine change in order to achieve the goals of feminism. Feminist texts benefited politically from the revolutionary potential of one broadly, albeit awkwardly, united group (women) attempting to claim equality with another (a conflated idea of patriarchy and men as its cause/beneficiaries). That is why much of the work that followed in the footsteps of Millet, Firestone, Rowbotham *et al* continued to focus on women's relationship to patriarchy rather than women's relationship to men. As the field broadened, however, the multiple subjectivities of women that it considered demonstrated an increased awareness that there was, and always had been, a need for multiple feminisms to focus on the differences between its subjects, as well as the things that drew them together.

Many texts that attempt to present an overview of the field will make reference to the many, and distinct, feminisms that now help to structure the field. What Chris Beasley describes as the "impatient enquiry" (1999, p.ix) of the title of her introduction to feminist theory, *What Is Feminism?*, suggests the complexity and potentially unanswerable nature of the question she is confronting. Her analysis is framed by a broadly historical overview of the development of feminist thought. She begins with the liberal, radical and Marxist/socialist positions, each of which deals

with the social and economic position of women to a patriarchal society. Turning then to postmodern and poststructuralist feminism, with their emphasis on destabilising the category of 'women' and acknowledging the plurality of subject positions that this encompasses, she finishes by stressing the multiplicity of feminisms in existence, particularly emphasising postcolonial feminism's attention to racial and ethnic difference. While not all overviews of feminism reproduce this historical narrative, a fundamental shift from a notion of unity to one of plurality when it comes to defining women, as feminism's object of study, is often included. Jane Freedman, for example, structures her introduction to feminism around a series of issues rather than moments, such as political power, employment and economics and sexuality. Yet she still rounds off her analysis by investigating the difficult position in which the "postmodern challenge" has left the political motivations that underlie feminism:

"Poststructuralist and postmodernist feminists thus argue for the deconstruction of the fixed category of woman and criticize other types of feminism for their essentialism in trying to define women and femininity....But does this mean that it is necessary to abandon 'women' as a category of analysis and to move away from political struggles based on collective identity? Not necessarily. It is obviously vital that feminists take into account differences of all kinds between women and take seriously the challenge to the idea of women as a collective identity. But this does not mean that there can no longer be collective struggle...the adoption of collective identities can be vital for political struggle." (Freedman, 2001, p.92).

While it is beyond the intention and scope of this thesis to outline all of the different approaches that can currently be brought together under the umbrella of feminism, the way in which the field developed from a relatively homogenous exploration of women's relationship to patriarchy (as an ostensibly coherent category) to an exploration of multiplicity of subject positions which inherently interrogated the supposed coherence of this category, offers both an entry point and a model for the development of the field of Masculinity Studies.

The beginnings of what can now be identified as a field of study focusing on masculinity already, by necessity, grappled with the problematic place of men in relation to feminism. Once again, Bristow's analysis of Millet's work offers an astute summation of the way in which feminism's focus on patriarchal power factored men into feminist debate as a 'problem' to be solved, while its focus on the revolutionary potential, and responsibility, of feminist politics for the solution of this 'problem' potentially alienated them from the discourse. He goes as far as to suggest that Millet's work "both opened up, and almost simultaneously closed down, the analysis of the problem of men in Western culture" (Bristow, 1992, p.57). This is perhaps overstating things, and certainly heaps too much unwarranted responsibility on *Sexual Politics* alone. However, it does starkly set out the difficulty of discussing a form of masculinity based on an assumption of power, without exposing that power as constructed and thus opening up a subsequent debate surrounding the supposed coherence of patriarchal masculinity as a marker of universal personhood against which the notions of femininity under discussion are constructed.

There are deep-seated vested interests on both sides of this gendered debate in retaining the assumption of a coherent masculinity, of course. Jane Freeman acknowledged that feminism had necessarily, and positively, incorporated a greater awareness of the plurality of female subject positions and the potentially constructed and flexible nature of the categories that feminism traditionally placed in opposition to each of other. She also reminded us of the importance of retaining a collective identity for political ends, however, focusing on the similarities that characterised the position of seemingly disparate categories of gender rather than the differences that separated them. Equally, while not every man, or group of men, experiences the same relationship with patriarchy, the prevalence of patriarchal societies means that they

are likely to benefit in some way from the retention of this system. R. W. Connell usefully terms the basic truth of this unequal distribution of power the “patriarchal dividend”, commenting that,

“Normative definitions of masculinity...face the problem that not many men actually meet the normative standards. This point applies to hegemonic masculinity. The number of men rigorously practising the hegemonic pattern in its entirety may be quite small. Yet the majority of men gain from its hegemony, since they benefit from the patriarchal dividend, the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women.” (1995, p.79)

Both Freeman and Connell suggest the importance of retaining awareness of the continuing overarching inequalities between the broader categories of men and women in a patriarchal system in creating a politically and socially meaningful discourse of gender, despite the variation within those categories. Interestingly, Connell’s idea of the “patriarchal dividend” reaches outside of this discourse to suggest that the retention of a “hegemonic masculinity” continues to bolster the disparate ways in which different masculinities enact power within society.

With advantages for both men and women in retaining the idea of a hegemonic masculinity, it is hardly surprising that anything approaching the level of scrutiny that feminism applied to all aspects of the female experience being applied to the men was slow to appear. While the 1970s seems to offer a watershed, after which there was an explosion of texts that took women as their object of study, as late as 1987 it was still possible for collections such as *The Making of Masculinities* to be claiming to offer an overview of the “New Men’s Studies” (italics mine). In fact, the editor of this collection, Harry Brod, testifies to the newness of Men’s Studies as a distinct discipline when he attempts to outline a canon of works that have shaped it: “To speak of a men’s studies canon is premature. The field is still too new for such grandiose claims” (Brod, 1987, p.10). Despite the paucity of work being carried out

on masculinity at this stage it is still possible for Brod, and for readers of his collection, to pinpoint key approach, works and theorists that set the parameters for field.

He identifies Joseph Pleck as providing one of the first key studies with his book, *The Myth of Masculinity* (1983). The title of Pleck's work seems to point towards one of the key distinctions between the goals of Women's Studies, as an academic adjunct to feminism as a political movement, and the goals of Men's Studies, as a burgeoning offshoot of this academic discourse. One of the goals of feminist writing was to question the masculine bias of many academic discourses, giving voice to women through an analysis of common elements of the female experience that had traditionally been enacted under a silent shroud of assumed "naturalness". Early works in the field of Men's Studies run into the problem of attempting to provide the inverse of this process. A different kind of silence dictated the complexity of talking about masculinity, a silence based around the difficulty of speaking about an overarching assumption of masculine dominance that intrinsically structures the discourses through which one would hope to analyse it.

Michael. S. Kimmel, another pioneer in the field whose work is included in *The Making of Masculinities*, neatly summarises this paradox in his characterisation of "superordinate" masculinity: "...the superordinate is usually hypervisible as an individual; indeed to be a straight white man is to embody exactly what an 'individual' is. As a result, one is invisible as a member of a group." (2005, p.x). Kimmel's suggestion is that a certain formation of masculinity, namely the white, heterosexual masculinity most associated with patriarchy, is a universal marker in relation to which all other subjectivities are understood. As such, the dominant nature of this form of masculinity actually leads to an impossibility of analysing it without

exposing its constructed nature. Marking out this 'superordinate' masculinity as simply another subjectivity threatens to undermine the dominant nature that forms its stabilising core.

The formation of a Men's Movement, in relation to the politically inclined Women's Movement, attempted to grapple with this tricky theoretical problem. Adopting a subject position in opposition to this 'superordinate', patriarchal masculinity, some men sought to interact with feminism by exploring alternative forms of masculinity. Building on the Marxist/Socialist approach present in some of the feminist theory discussed previously, the journal *Achilles Heel* brought together articles from multiple disciplines which attempted to record and assist with the sort of 'consciousness raising' that men's groups had attempted as an echo of the 'consciousness raising' that had been common in women's groups. As the wielders of patriarchal power, however, the relationship of these enlightened men to the feminist project and the practical issues of formulating a coherent, or collective, response to feminism proved difficult. As editor of a collection of articles from the publication, Victor J. Seidler is well placed to discuss the ambiguity that both men and women may feel about the position of men within the feminist debate:

"Somehow we need a way of recognising the power that we, as men, have in relation to women, while not being paralysed or silenced about masculinity. It means recognising that sexual politics deeply challenges the ways we are allowed to be, as men and the kind of control and power that we take for granted

As men, we've responded to the women's movement in different ways....but we were all, in one way or another, threatened and confused by it, as soon as it touched the everyday reality of our relationships." (1991, p.64)

As the fraught tone of Seidler's analysis suggests, the attempt of *Achilles Heel* to offer a mouthpiece for a burgeoning men's movement ran into the same analytical problems that would trouble the field of Masculinity Studies as it grew. By attempting

to understand men's relationship to the power that they wield, to varying degrees, the men's movement left itself open to accusations that it was potentially attempting to co-opt a discourse from which men were necessarily excluded. The difficulty of entering the feminist debate without becoming "paralysed or silenced" by the recognition of an inherent complicity with patriarchy remained a problem. Not least because, as Seidler and Kimmel remind us, confronting this complicity meant not only experiencing threat and confusion on a personal level, but also questioning the ideology of personhood at the core of patriarchal culture; an ideology that provided a position against which feminism was in opposition and without which its political goals may struggle to be realised.

These contradictions may help to explain the relatively short-lived nature of *Achilles Heel*, which was published from 1978 to 1984, and the gap between its closure and the release of Seidler's collection in 1991, into an academic context becoming ever more receptive to the study of masculinity. These contradictions are also readily apparent in another key collection that attempted to address the relationship of men to feminism, namely Jardine and Smith's *Men In Feminism*. Beginning its first chapter, Stephen Heath's "Male Feminism", with the stark suggestion that "Men's relation to feminism is an impossible one" (Heath, 1987, p.1), each of the writers included in this collection make it clear that men's place within feminism is arguably as a problem to be solved, whether as patriarchal power wielding subject of analysis or as an enthusiastic but misguided ally compromised by their relationship to this power.

Yet shelves of books continued to appear that did take men and masculinities as their subject. The complexity of factoring men into the feminist debate was evidently not stopping many academics from tackling men as a subject in their own

right. Adopting the feminist conception of the personal as political, several texts found fruitful avenues for discussion of masculinity by contrasting the specific experiences of interviewees or men's group members with social expectations. David Cohen's *Being A Man* (1990), for example, combines autobiography, psychology and textual analysis to suggest that men have as much to gain from recognising the pressures and limitations that a patriarchal concept of masculinity places on them. Just as Betty Freidan's pioneering work made explicit the problematic nature of the gap between the expectations placed on housewives within the rigidly nuclear ideal of the suburban family and the individuals tasked with enacting this model, Cohen's focus on the emotional well-being of individual men, including himself first and foremost, suggests the possibility of a similar disenfranchisement. Discussing the limited ability of individuals to produce a change in their own lives without a corresponding change in society, Cohen concludes that:

“The individual's change is not enough....many of the assumptions about how men feel and react are societal or ideological assumptions. They aren't accurate descriptions of how individual people act or behave. Not surprisingly, though, the assumptions are powerful and affect the way that we see ourselves.” (1990, p.92)

Extending, as Cohen's analysis clearly does, from a feminist tradition that had been investigating the disparity between the ideological assumptions that structure societal expectations of femininity and the subjectivities of individuals within that category, this may seem like a rather obvious conclusion. If, as feminism made apparent, there was a discrepancy between the ideology of femininity and the experience of women, surely the potential existed for a similar discrepancy between the ideology of masculinity and the experience of men. This fundamental split between ideology and experience had already lead to at least two decades of debate within the academy surrounding the female half of this discrepancy before Cohen's

tentative suggestion that the same could be true for men. Once again, this was due to both the theoretical complexity of deconstructing a mythology of masculinity that both assumed and bolstered male advantage, as well as the literal impact of this deconstruction on men's place within society. Whereas women obviously stood to benefit from questioning the ideology that maintained their position as second class citizens, even men who felt restricted by existing ideologies of masculinity had to come to terms with the potential loss of power that came with exposing their constructed nature.

The beginnings of a potential field of Masculinity Studies, of which books such as *Being A Man* form a part, demonstrate the desire, but also the anxiety, that questioning masculinity as a concept, or set of concepts, evoked. Instead of rallying calls for collective action or formulating new identities, even these proactive attempts to engage with the politics and theory of the Women's Movement could not completely deny that men faced losses as well as gains through undertaking this kind of analysis.

The very title of Andrew Tolson's *The Limits of Masculinity* (1988), for example, demonstrated a need to question masculine dominance in response to the feminist challenge, while the analysis within acknowledged the contradiction that this questioning created through its ability to make individual men feel powerless, both in their day to day lives and in their ability to contribute to social change:

"Several feminist writers have commented on this 'problem of masculinity'- the defensive insecurity of men in post-war society. What is at stake is the maintenance, by an individual man, of his patriarchal privilege, in a context where it is progressively undermined. Middle-class men, especially, find their expectations contradicted- by bureaucracy at work, or by the failure of real sexuality to live up its consumer image....At the heart of the masculine experience they have discovered a sense of futility." (Tolson, 1988, p.16)

As *Being A Man*, *The Limits of Masculinity* and the complex relationship between men and feminism explored in *Achilles Heel* and a number of other collections demonstrate, the “problem of masculinity”, both for men and women, was swiftly setting the terms for academic debate about men. Some feminists might have been uneasy about the poststructuralist and postmodern shift from Women’s Studies to the now more common Gender Studies, exemplified by the publication, and subsequent success, of Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* in 1990; questioning its effect on the potential for collective action. Regardless, the increasing currency that the view of gender as a series of constructed subjectivities was gaining within the academy was not only a result of feminism’s exposure of the constructed nature of patriarchy, but also called for an acknowledgement of the constructed nature of the ideology of masculinity that underpinned it.

Throughout the 1990s, this shift towards Gender Studies encouraged a proliferation of texts concerning various aspects of masculinity and the beginnings of a coherent field of Masculinity Studies began to be formulated. Each of the different approaches that these works adopted, however, had to grapple with the same “problem of masculinity” that had complicated the analysis of men’s place within a patriarchal society that had characterised the relationship between men and feminism. Whereas the feminist movement suggested that the deconstruction of ideologies of femininity could be experienced as liberation, the equivalent deconstruction of ideologies of dominant masculinity was mainly characterised as “crisis”. By the early 1990s this rhetoric of “crisis” was beginning to pervade both academic and popular discourse.

Talk of the “crisis” in masculinity and the “feminization” of society had preceded this 1990s proliferation, of course, with a number of works and movements

pre-empting the pressure under which an increased theoretical focus on gender would place a form of masculinity dependent on the assumption of power. Particularly in the United States, where debates about the erosion of masculine power still seem to excite greater debate than they do in the UK, but also worldwide, concerns about the potential threats that the dual processes of industrialization and women's liberation posed for men had long been expressed. As we shall see in more detail later, many of these debates, such as 'momism' were centred on the place of the father and the undue influence that women had on masculine development through their increased responsibility for childcare. In the context of a society dealing with the dual historical ruptures of two closely spaced global conflicts, which had led to the literal removal of large swathes of men from society, either temporarily through service or permanently through death, there was understandable anxiety about the effect of this rupture of society. Equally, the more gradual process of industrialisation, which had changed the relationship between private life and work, by separating them and making one almost solely the domain of men, had also created an ideology of separate spheres of experience that starkly exposed the inequalities of gender any time these spheres began to overlap. The steadily increasing influence of women within society and employment (spheres of experience traditionally viewed as 'masculine') which was both the catalyst for, and the result of, sustained feminist analysis was already forcing people to question the effect that this process would have on men from the moment it entered both academic and popular discourse.

Myron Benton's *The American Male* (1967) for example, begins with a discussion of "the male in crisis" before concluding that it is only by embracing new models of masculinity that this crisis can be averted, and it is, in fact, outmoded concepts of patriarchal masculinity that are responsible for the fragile position of men (Benton,

1967, p.233). Equally, Karl Bednarik's *The Male in Crisis* (1968) includes astute analysis of the way in which masculine authority is eroded by the interconnected processes of technological innovation, industrialisation and the rise of consumer culture, applying similar psychoanalytic principles to support his arguments. Unlike Benton, however, Bednarik sees the crisis in masculinity as solvable by reinstating masculine authority within the home.

This tension between seeing the erosion of masculine dominance as a threat or as opportunity exhibits the same tension that is evident in the attempts to integrate men into feminist theory that characterise the men's movement. While the academic collections discussed earlier addressed the complexities of the relationship of men to feminism, popular or practical attempts to resolve these complexities often resorted to separatism or the reinstatement of masculine power. The mythopoetic men's movement, which gained currency in the United States throughout the 1980s, arguably exhibits the increasing separation of even politically and socially engaged men from the original goals of the women's movement, namely greater gender equality, that had inspired them. Carefully analysed by Michael Schwalbe, in his book *Unlocking The Iron Cage* (1996), he documents the movement's attempts to build alternative masculine identities based upon the ritual separation of these men's groups from female influence. Schwalbe also suggests that; "...despite the existence of a much older, profeminist men's movement- (the mythopoetic movement) became popularly known as *the men's movement*" (Schwalbe, 1996, p.4), a claim that is arguably backed up by the huge success of John Bly's *Iron John* (1991), the movement's founding text and one of the few truly popular works of literature to emerge from the male half of gender politics. Schwalbe also critiques the ultimate ability of the mythopoetic men's movement to come to terms with the material

realities of patriarchal power, suggesting that, through an emphasis on individual fulfilment, culture and the ritual separation of men from men, it failed to account for the way in which this power was enacted by its participants. With historical perspective, it now seems clear that the mythopoetic men's movement in some senses bridges the gap between the increasing desire to integrate men and masculinity into the debates surrounding gender that had grown out the feminist movement and the rhetoric of 'crisis' that followed. In its turning away from political action, or even analysis, and its emphasis on the personal fulfilment of its members, the movement suggests that even men actively engaged in the task of questioning and reshaping masculine identities experienced the loss of the assumed authority that this process entailed as potentially threatening.

Certainly, as the field of Masculinity Studies coalesced there was a sense that this threat to a patriarchal form of masculinity was both a necessary factor in changing the material conditions of gender and an inevitable result of turning the gaze of intellectual enquiry onto men. The rhetoric of 'crisis' that persisted into the 1990s, and gained currency in popular culture as well as in academic discourse, was bolstered by an overwhelming sense that the project of Masculinity Studies was to question the very notion of a coherent masculinity that underpinned patriarchy. Work began to emerge that appeared to intrinsically set itself against to this dominant model by suggesting the need for alternative formations. The politically engaged work of self-confessed 'radical feminist' John Stoltenberg, for example, progressed from an active posture with *Refusing To Be A Man* (1989, 2000a) to a passive acknowledgment of *The End of Manhood* (1993, 2000b), despite the intellectual and political thrust of his work remaining the same. It is hard to imagine a more succinct expression of the intellectual moment in which Masculinity Studies truly flourished

than the different tone set by the titles of these works. The first expresses a deliberate desire to reject membership of the category of 'man' completely, in keeping with the feminist thrust of the discursive moment in which it was released. The second figures this rejection as an external process that is inevitable and, at least partially, underway; in keeping with the postmodern politics of gender construction that were dominating the field just a few short years later.

The new mutability of masculine identities that was the result of this increased discursive focus was dealt with in many different ways, just as a range of feminist critique of the idea of a coherent category of 'woman' exposed its constructed nature and the variety of experiences and alternative subjectivities that it concealed. A new vocabulary was formed that created conceptual space for unpacking the way in which masculine identities were formed. Rather than bolstering the notion of a coherent marker of universal personhood, studies of masculinity started to speak of the 'mythical' nature of masculinity as created through culture (Easthope, 1990; Horrocks, 1995; Blazina, 2003). Acknowledging the constructed nature of this apparently mythological masculinity recoded it from a position of assumed dominance to a flexible identity, or series of identities, which could be shaped into alternative formulations. Some studies focused on the way in which this process was already integral to an existing monolithic notion of 'masculinity', thus undermining claims to universality, as the works brought together in the collection *Constructing Masculinity* (Berger *et al*, 1995) attest. John MacInnes (1998) even went as far as declaring the "end of masculinity", casting back to the foundations of the discourse of gender to suggest that the tensions that had always existed within this discourse were symptomatic of the non-existence of a coherent model, suggesting the limitations of the term as a conceptual tool.

Once again, however, once the philosophical discourse of masculinity as a series of constructed identities had become established, it is also possible to identify differences between the ways in which this was dealt with in relation to the category of men than a similar awareness of the constructed nature of femininity was integrated into a discussion of the category of women. While women's relationship to patriarchal culture meant that troubling the concepts of femininity that shaped that category often offered the potential for liberation, the idea of questioning the concept of masculinity that ensured male dominance had to deal with this different relationship with power. Some followed the feminist project, that we have seen helped to define the earliest parameters of the study of men, in seeing this philosophical movement as an opportunity to reassess, and restructure, what it meant to be a man once traditional notions of masculinity were being troubled. Harry Christian, for example, investigates feminism's legacy in affecting change, suggesting the potential that flexible notions of gender holds for "making" 'anti-sexist' men (1994).

By attempting to sever the intrinsic connection between the category of men, and the cultural notion of masculinity, the increasing prominence of debates surrounding gender also opened up the possibility of recognising a greater range of potential subjectivities within the category of men. A series of highly situated sub-disciplines within Gender and Masculinity Studies reflected recognition of the complex position that many men also occupied in relation to the concept of patriarchal power that had long been the focus of a feminist inflected field. One example was the concurrent rise of the field of "Queer Studies" (Beemyn and Eliason, 1996), which focuses on the interactions between non-heterosexual sexual identities and categories of gender, inevitably including an increased emphasis on the position of homosexual men in relation to hegemonic masculinity, such as the influential work

of Jeffrey Weeks (1991). The attempts of Queer Studies and Queer Theory to grapple with the concept of transgender subjectivities perhaps demonstrated more than ever how the flexible notion of gender, as distinct from the rigid categories of men and women as primarily defined through biology, had gained increasing academic and cultural acceptance. Equally, theorists began to look beyond the exclusively Western context, namely the US and the UK, which had shaped so much of the debate as it continues to do today, to the complex relationships between men and masculinities across different cultures. By the early 2000s, the field of Masculinity Studies was well established enough to have produced collections of work on masculinity in Asia (Chopra *et al*, 2004), Africa (Lindsay and Miescher, 2003), Latin America (Gutmann, 2003) and the Middle East (Ghoussoub and Sinclair-Webb, 2000), amongst others.

The notion of a coherent model of universal masculinity was also troubled by the increasing presence of studies of gender within the field of history. Retrospectively investigating the way in which masculinities had been conceived across time, masculinity was shown to have always been highly mutable depending on the historical context in which it was enacted. As two entries in the “Women and Men in History” series testify, the various formations of masculinity that have been discussed as structuring male identity in the context of medieval Europe (Hadley, 1999) vary greatly from the those that structured masculinity in the “early modern” context (Foyster, 1999). As historical analysis gets closer to the contemporary context, however, the patriarchal form of masculinity, and its place within the maintenance of the gender order of our society joins the broader field of Masculinity Studies in identifying the complexity of maintaining this dominant position. As we shall see in more detail in later chapters, John Tosh’s (1999) analysis of the place of men within the home pinpoints the complexity of integrating masculinity and the domestic sphere,

within the context of the rise of industrialism, as a prime motivator of change within concepts of Western masculinity. This critical moment is also reflected in Jonathon Rutherford's (1997) work on masculinity and empire, suggesting a discourse on masculinity that, we shall see, extends further back than the post-feminist context in which they are working.

The theoretical process of severing the integral connection between men as a social category, and masculinity as a cultural identity, was not always treated as cause for celebration, however. While work may have been appearing that gave voice to previously silent categories and identities that had been subsumed beneath a monolithic notion of white, patriarchal masculinity as the defining subjectivity in Western society, the dissolution of that notion was understandably experienced as threat by some. That the group who would have most closely identified with this threatened model, namely the 'superordinate' form of White, heterosexual masculinity, would also have maintained a high degree of cultural power meant that the effects of this threat could easily find a voice.

A far cry from Kimmel's idea of the superordinate's invisibility, the new definition which the investigation of this hegemonic form of masculinity gave it as a distinct concept allowed those who continued to define themselves in relation to it to express the fragile position in which they now found themselves. Susan Faludi's bestselling *Backlash* (1991) paints a convincing portrait of the way on which feminism was blamed for apparently dismantling the patriarchal privilege of men throughout the 1980s, while the dialectic between a monolithic concept of feminism and a universal category of men is still apparent in the early 1990s work of David Thomas (1993). More subtle analyses, which presented the idea of men as the victims of notions of a restrictive masculinity that was no longer relevant also began to appear

(Farrell, 1993), paradoxically suggesting that even those who were most able to assume the mantle of patriarchal masculinity were both wounded by the expectation that they would *and* by the removal of their ability to do so.

Faludi's sensitively pitched companion piece to *Backlash, Stiffed* (1999), suggested that, by the end of the millennium, this may have been more than simple sour grapes inspired by the perceived loss of patriarchal privilege. While she quite rightly stops well short of suggesting that it is men who are primarily challenged by the need to reassess gender identities in the postmodern context, thus ignoring the real inequalities of gender that remain, she does identify the central complexity that this reassessment poses for men, and the anxiety that this can cause:

“Men feel the contours of a box too, but they are told that his box is of their own manufacture, designed to their specifications. Who are they to complain? The box is there to showcase the man, not to confine him. After all, didn't he build it- and can't he destroy it if he pleases, is he a *man*? For men to say they feel boxed is regarded not as laudable political protest but as childish and indecent whining.” (Faludi, 1999, p.13)

As Faludi's acknowledgement that the paradox of talking about masculinities suggests, while a new vocabulary had formed that allowed a greater diversity in the analysis of different types of masculine identities than ever before, the process of replacing a monolithic notion with a notion of plurality was both complex and incomplete. While the processes of 'constructing', 'redefining' or 'recreating' an idea of multiple masculinities based on an acknowledgement of its 'mythical' nature defines much of the contemporary discourse in the field, the complexities of applying these processes to an identity with such a central place within a patriarchal culture has also meant that this has not been seen as an entirely positive process. To suggest that acknowledging the constructed nature of gender allows for a complete severing of the concept of masculinity from the category of men is misleading. The questions that the

constructed nature of gender have posed about the way in which patriarchal power is enacted by men, however, have led to an alternative, less positive vocabulary arising that characterises men, as currently uneasy wielders of this power, as “problem” (Dench, 1994), as “fragile” (Greenstein, 1993) or, as in Cythnia R. Daniels work on “the science and politics of male reproduction” (Daniels, 2006), ‘exposed’ in a way that would have been unthinkable in previous historical periods. By investigating the way in which the ideology of what it means to be a man, as a member of an organising category, has been altered by an increasing scientific focus on reproduction, and the dissemination of this science in discourse, Daniels once again reveals the overlaps between identities and practices that structure debate. While an acknowledgement of the constructed nature of the categories of both men and fathers might suggest the ability to question the intimate connection between the two, in discourse they are still inextricably intertwined. Daniels chooses not to see the arguably decreasing importance of men to the biological process of reproduction, in a cultural context which includes a focus on a decline in their fertility and the increasing commonality of artificial insemination as simply exposing fatherhood, as a distinct concept. Instead, she investigates the way in which fertility and reproduction both structure, and are structured by, cultural notions of masculinity more generally. She confronts the inevitable paradox that talking about the vulnerability of men’s reproductive position creates by suggesting that:

“If men were as vulnerable to the harms of the outside world...then how were we to justify the ideal of men as superior in strength and as the protectors and providers of women and children? Public exposure of men’s private reproductive troubles threatened to throw into question not just the health of the male body but these deeper ideals of masculinity as well.” (Daniels, 2006, p.4)

For Daniels it is not just fathers who are threatened by an ‘exposure’ of their vulnerability, but all men. Her work demonstrates the continuing importance of the role of the father in providing a foundation for the interconnectedness of the category of men and a series of masculine identities. By suggesting that both men, and an ideology of masculinity which presumably helps define this category, are still bound up with the assumption of an ability to be “the protectors and providers of women and children”, Daniels reminds us of the fundamental role that notions of fathering have played, and continue to play, in constructing our gendered society. Despite the increasing discursive acknowledgement of a multiplicity of masculine identities, it is potentially the collective concepts of fatherhood, fathers and fathering against which variation is judged. It is the link between patriarchy and fatherhood that ensures that the latter remains so central, and so contested, within the discourse of gender.

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The Place of the Family and Fatherhood Within The Discourse of Masculinity

The importance of the family in this discourse of gender cannot be overstated. Often conceived as the primary organising unit of society, the family has been cited as the primary method through which the patriarchal structure of our society has reproduced itself. In sociology, for example, the biological functionalist explanation of the place of the family within society, which will be explored in more detail later, suggests that its primary motivations are the socialisation of children and the stabilisation of adult personalities (Parsons, 1956). By prioritising the reproductive process, this limited notion of both what a family *is* and what a family *does* necessarily privileges the heterosexual, reproductive relationship that is at its core. Equally, psychoanalytic

discourses place the family centre stage, commenting on the way in which subjectivities are created through relationships between family members. Despite the rhetoric of 'crisis' that we have seen pervades the contemporary discourse on masculinity, and which we shall see has also influenced the specific discourse of family and fatherhood, the nuclear family remains the core model through which deviation is understood. The very idea of 'crisis' within discourse arguably implies a monolithic notion which is being challenged. The nuclear model forms the basis of this notion. In the concurrent and intertwined growth of a field of Fatherhood Studies, as in the broader culture that these academic debates influence and shape, we see similar movements towards quantifying and challenging this notion of a singular concept as shaped the study of masculinity.

As Parson's work within sociology implies, study had been done that focused on the family, and the place of fatherhood within it, prior to the academic acceptance of feminism. The idea of sex role theory, for example, which gained ground as early as the 1930s (Connell, 1987, p.47), usefully elucidated the different positions that men and women had in relation to different societal structures. Conceiving of sex roles as distinct from, but shaped by, biological differences between men and women, sex role theory drew a distinction between the individual, their social position and the actions that this position demanded. R.W. Connell also argues that by drawing these distinctions sex role theory opened up the possibility of adopting counter-positions, thus implying their usefulness in conceiving of the idea of alternative organisations of sex roles to the ones primarily observed. Connell also comments on the potential limits of sex role theory, however, perhaps offering an explanation of the way in which it has been overtaken by a more radical notion of gender construction:

“What happens in sex role theory is that the missing element of structure is covertly supplied by the biological category of sex...The underlying image is an invariant biological base and a malleable social superstructure. This is why discussion of sex roles constantly slides into discussion of sex differences. The implicit question in sex role analysis is what particular superstructure has been created in such-and-such circumstances, and how far the biological dichotomy still shows through.” (Connell, 1987, p.50)

As Cynthia R. Daniels’ examination of the way in which attitudes to reproduction, and by extension to men, demonstrates, this biological dichotomy continues to shape many of the debates about fatherhood. Of course, as Connell’s astute critique makes clear, while sex role theory may have been useful in opening up the possibility of talking about men and women’s differing roles, including their differing roles in the process of parenting, even as it separated the notion of the individual subject from the societal expectations that shaped them, it also relied on the fundamental principle that these societal expectations were themselves based on biological differences. The complexities of discourses of sex and gender once again reveal themselves. Sex role theory simultaneously opened up the tantalising possibility of adopting different roles while solidifying the parameters that it observed through an appeal to biological essentialism.

The particular sex roles that were observed also need to be historically and culturally situated, rather than dissolving potential tensions through this appeal to essentialism. The insertion of gender into discourse cannot escape from the material reality of its conception. In the case of sex role theory, while valuable work was done on the different roles that men and women played in society, this would inevitably be observing and quantifying the specific make-up of the society in which this study was undertaken. In a subsequent analysis of the development of gender as an object of study, R. W. Connell suggests that, “the ‘sexual division of labour’ was the first structure of gender to be recognised in social science, and remains the centre of most

discussion of gender in anthropology and economics” (2002, p.60). While it is hard to deny, as these social sciences suggests, that there is a universal trend towards a sexual division of labour observable in a range of cultures it is important to acknowledge the potentially fluid nature of this division across these cultures and over time. As we shall see through an exploration of the way in which the nuclear model has dominated the discourse on the family within the Western-centred social sciences that set the parameters of debate, this acknowledgement was arguably slow to appear. The division of labour would have been pretty stark within this model, with the majority of men removed from the domestic sphere through the increase in industrial working practices. As the beginnings of a discourse of gender coalesced around an analysis of this specific model, historical, social and biological precedents were all appealed to in order to create a sense of its potentially universal, and natural, character. While this increasing presence of the nuclear model within this discourse therefore seemed to be presenting a singular, dominant notion of family life, though talking about it at all it opened up the possibility of conceiving of deviation from that model.

The ‘sexual division of labour’ and its centrality within the nuclear family inevitably meant that the place of men, and fatherhood as an aspect of a male ‘sex role’, has been factored into the discourse in a very specific way. Based on his absence from the domestic sphere, the patriarchal model of fatherhood has been critiqued by feminists as a method of retaining control of the spheres of culture and society and confining women to the domestic, but still arguably remains the dominant model within our society. In later chapters, exploring the development of our contemporary discourse on fatherhood, we shall see the central place that the nuclear family model has held in theorising the formation of a patriarchal society. We shall also see how the growth of the human sciences within the academy, such as

anthropology and sociology, influenced feminism to follow them in placing this specific model at the centre of their analysis.

The result of this focus on the nuclear family is arguably the creation of a paradoxical approach to the presence of men within the discourse of gender. As bearers of patriarchal power, discussion of men as a category has often been inevitably conflated with the symbolic position that this category holds in relation to this power. By 1949 Simone De Beauvoir was kick starting the second wave of feminism by famously claiming that “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman (1988, p.296), while elucidating the various factors which achieved this. As Bristow’s critique of *Sexual Politics* suggests, however, a similar elucidation of the ways in which male identities were formed did not serve feminism’s broadly political purpose. As beneficiaries of a patriarchal culture men were the ‘superordinate’ markers of universal personhood against which the inequalities of the female experience could be understood. By bringing a discussion of sex and gender into the academy, the rise in prominence of feminism, as with sex role theory, opened up the possibility of discussing gender while simultaneously placing limits on that discussion through its reliance on an established model.

In the case of fatherhood, the most apparent expression of a patriarchal form of masculinity, it was even harder to untangle the way in which its separation from the sphere of family life, which it began to be demonstrated was one of the primary ways in which this patriarchal society reproduced itself, could be factored into the discourse as a presence while also still being understood. While work started to appear within Second Wave Feminism that demonstrated the primacy of motherhood within the process of reproduction and the limiting effects that this placed on conceptions of femininity (Dinnerstein, 1976; Rich; 1977; Chodorow, 1978), work that focused

exclusively on fatherhood more often demonstrated an anxiety about losing its dominant position.

Maureen Green entitled her 1976 book *Goodbye Father*, discussing the absence of fatherhood from the discourses of gender that had proliferated in the first half of the 20th century:

“Fifty years ago, Virginia Woolf called women ‘the most discussed animal in the universe.’ Women are still an obsessive topic, the centre of all attention as they churn over their options, their rights and their duties. Millions of miles of newsprint have been devoted to just one aspect of women’s live- motherhood. By comparison, men get very little attention at all; and when they do, popular interest seems to centre on men as aggressors, as hunters. Man as family man, as father, is never on the agenda” (Green, 1976, p.1)

The very existence of *Goodbye Father* might suggest that Green’s apparent farewell is premature, however. While she may be correcting in stating that there was relatively little attention paid to the construction of fatherhood within the growing field of Gender Studies, certainly in comparison with motherhood, her book forms part of a change in those circumstances. 1976 also saw the publication of the first edition of a collection of work on *The Role of the Father in Child Development*, edited by Michael Lamb. This collection has since been revised and reprinted many times and is currently on its 5th edition (Lamb, 2010), implying a steadily growing field of Fatherhood Studies. Somewhat inevitably, taking into account the increasing prominence of gender within the academy, fatherhood had begun to find its way onto the agenda after all, just as a field of Masculinity Studies had also slowly grown.

The two distinct emphases of Lamb’s collection and Green’s book remain in evidence throughout the developing discipline of Fatherhood Studies that they played a role in formulating. These approaches can, once again, broadly be defined

in relation to their decision to focus on different aspects of the three distinct elements identified by Esther Dermott as constituting the object of study (2008, p.8). The consistent development of Lamb's collection, for example, demonstrates a continuing sociological interest in fathering and fathers, broadening out concepts of the various 'roles' that fathers play in the process of childrearing and concentrating on the various activities that constitute father involvement. By investigating the different ways in which fathering, as a process, can be enacted, this approach has led to an ever-increasing acknowledgement of the plurality of individual experiences of being a father, and being fathered. The work across all disciplines on all types of fathers and fathering which has proliferated are simply too numerous to list. Dermott suggests that this proliferation has expanded to an even greater degree since the 1990s, however, suggesting that, as was the case with the burgeoning field of Masculinity Studies, an increasing acceptance of the more flexible idea of gender, as opposed to the biologically situated sex, led to a greater ability to conceive of multiple models of gendered practice:

"As recently as the 1990s, academic writing on masculinity often excluded discussions of fatherhood altogether and texts on the sociology of the family did not automatically include references to fatherhood....Collections of writing on the sociology of the family would now be considered lacking if, at minimum, one chapter was not dedicated to some aspect of fatherhood." (Dermott, 2008, p.8)

A crucial development in the ability to theorise different forms of fathering and fatherhood was an increasing acknowledgement of the different spaces in which family life was enacted, breaking the monopoly of the domestic sphere. As we shall see, the discourse of the nuclear family, that structured the discourse of fatherhood for so long, was dependent for its maintenance on the division of labour discussed by Connell and the father absence that this implied. Just as a plurality of situated

masculine identities questioned the idea of a monolithic notion of masculinity, paying increasing attention to the variety of fathering experiences both in and out of the home allowed for an increased commonality of an ‘involved’ model (sometimes conflated with the concept of the ‘new’ father) (Palkovitz, 2002). This expanded notion of father involvement not only attempted to quantify potential changes within the nuclear model, but also discussed ways in which fathering occurs within divorced families (Arendell, 1995) and step families (Marsiglio, 2004), suggesting that father involvement is not entirely dependent on their presence within the domestic sphere. The common acceptance of the increasingly ‘situated’ nature of different fathering practices (Marsiglio *et al*, 2005) and the spaces in which these practices were enacted allowed for a range of fathering and fathers to become a subject of discourse which increasingly questioned the singular notion of patriarchal fatherhood which had previously dominated through discursive silence. As Stuart Aitken’s (2009) characterisation of these “spaces of fathering” as still “awkward” makes clear however, this increasing plurality of fathers and fathering must still necessarily interact with the broader notion of fatherhood, leading to a continual anxiety surrounding all three.

With the discourse of fatherhood becoming more and more diffuse as it expanded, it might be argued that what Maureen Green was saying ‘goodbye’ to in the title of her book was a singular model of patriarchal fatherhood. Certainly, the second trend in Fatherhood Studies that follows in her wake conflates the notion of fathers’ ever-increasing absence from the domestic sphere through rising divorce and falling marriage rates with an absence at the heart of our culture. Once again, the 1990s also provides a perceived point of “crisis” at which fatherhood, like the broader concepts of masculinity and maleness to which it contributed, was seen as

problematic. The work of Popenoe (1996) and Blankenhorn (1995), for example, conflated arguments about the demographics of fathering with the cultural notion of fatherhood to suggest that it was not simply the literal absence of fathers from the home that should concern us, but that we should also confront the absence of a “belief in fathers” (Blankenhorn, 1995, p.3). Once again, the paradoxical nature of studying fatherhood presents itself in these analyses. Rather than identifying a complete absence of fathers in culture, the conservative family values inflected work of Blankenhorn and Popenoe actually conflates a demographic decrease in the nuclear family model, and the absence of the father from the home that this often entails, with a lack of faith in the concept of the father altogether. While the process of expanding models of fathering had been continuing since the 1970s, situating various practices outside of the rigid confines of the patriarchal model, work that attempted to grapple with the contemporary meaning of fatherhood, as a symbolic combination of both ideology and practice, needed to confront the challenges to the power of the patriarch model of fatherhood that this expansion created. In the symbolic realm of culture, therefore, it was more than possible to identify the lack of belief in fathers which so concerned Blankenhorn and Popenoe, as the conflation of this waning patriarchal model and the practices of fathering were imperfectly reflected in the tensions surrounding popular representations of fatherhood.

While the majority of literature on parenting is still aimed at women, there has been a rise in the number of books that attempt to provide advice on what to expect for men. These generally reflect the uncertain position of fathering within culture, however, by relying on humour to present a model of fatherhood as an unnatural, challenging but ultimately rewarding pursuit, which men are not well-placed to confront without help (Jennings, 1999; Berkman, 2005). Dermott (2008, p.9) also

identifies an increase in narratives of fatherhood in popular literature, citing Tony Parsons' *Man And Boy* (1999) and Nick Hornby's *About A Boy* (1998). Both of these novels also express the complexities of fatherhood, dealing, as they do, with divorced and surrogate fathering respectively. They also both hinge on the notion of a masculinity which is mired in an eternal adolescence, with their main characters only achieving full adulthood through building a relationship with the child in their care. As such, they perfectly demonstrate the dual movements that shape the culture of fatherhood. They both express the multiplicity of fathering roles which are possible while also suggesting a lack within each of their protagonists that can only be fulfilled by the successful fulfilment of their roles. While they champion new forms of fatherhood, therefore, they are also arguably contributing to a notion of a problematic masculinity that can only be resolved through the assumption of a patriarchal role. Nathanson and Young (2001) and Synnott (2009), both identify more openly sinister trends, arguing that an increasing spread of misandry in popular culture reflects the legacy of a questioning of patriarchy and its conflation with the category of men. Synnott's analysis in particular supports the idea that this misandry is reflected primarily as incompetence when it comes to fathers, citing a study by the National Fatherhood Initiative that suggests fathers on television are eight times more likely to be "incompetent and irresponsible" than are mothers. (2009, p.138)

As we can see from this overview of the development of the fields, the work of unpacking masculinities, and fatherhood as an aspect of masculine identity, has always suffered from the confusion between the symbolic and material realms. This confusion has led to a bifurcation in approach, which has seen the increasing discursive presence of a plurality of masculinities, and fathers, within academic discourse, and an anxiety about what this means for the patriarchal models which

provided the starting point for analysis. The figure of the father, being the masculine identity most intimately associated with patriarchy, has presented particular problems, with many of the earlier studies of masculinity ignoring it altogether.

As plural notions of both masculinity and fatherhood have come to reveal themselves in academia and in popular culture, it has become necessary to present an analysis of the ways in which these plural notions have affected the unified concept of fatherhood which they would seem to question. An increasing distinction between the separate concepts of fathers, fathering and fatherhood troubles the goal of a unified theory of fatherhood. Yet, there is still a sense of coherence suggested by the continued use of the term, and its privileged discursive position against which deviation is established. How is this dominance maintained despite the paradoxical discursive position of fatherhood which opens up the possibility of deviation? It is in acknowledging and investigating the historically situated nature of the discourse of fatherhood, as conflated with the patriarch model within the nuclear family model, through which we can understand the dominant position of this model within discourse.

2: The Evolution of the Nuclear Family

When we speak of ‘the family’ of what are we actually speaking? Do the unwed, cohabiting couple constitute a family, or do they require emotional and social ties slightly more permanent (or at least official) to justify the label? Is it really possible to speak of self-selected friendship groups as a new form of family, reaching its cultural apotheosis in the unbreakable bond shared by the six main characters in the hugely successful American sitcom *Friends*? And what of pets?

It is difficult to imagine that Christopher Lasch (1979, p.xx) had any of the above permutations in mind when he wrote of “the family besieged” or suggested that, “the family has been slowly coming apart for more than a hundred years”. Conversely, when David Cooper (1971) heralded the “Death of the Family”, it is difficult to imagine that he would have been anything other than encouraging towards more communal, less rigid structures of spousal commitment and procreative and child-rearing activities. Nevertheless, their use of the term implies both a fundamentally coherent concept at the heart of their separate arguments and a sense of the controversy that it can engender. ‘The family’, to Lasch and Cooper amongst many others, may be an institution equally worthy of passionate defence or deconstruction but there is little doubt for either that it actually exists.

The proceeding three decades have seen a constant rise in the amount written, both in academia and in the media, about the ‘decline’ of the family and the consequent erosion of ‘family values’ that such a decline entails. From David Blankenhorn’s shrill epitaph for the two-parent family in *Fatherless America* (1995) to Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim’s more considered analysis of the “post-familial family” (1998) it seems that even when commenting on the apparent lack of coherence in contemporary familial arrangements the term itself continues to stand for a concept,

or at the very least a set of concepts, comprehensible to most of us. Concepts that can be used as a point of comparison from which to judge the validity of the seemingly endless permutations that more accurately represent the web of interwoven relationships characterising most people's experience of family life.

Whether critiquing or defending it the dominant myth behind this shared understanding of the term 'family' is usually fairly transparent; the fallout from the 'nuclear' model continues to permeate the discourse at almost every level.

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The Origins Of A Dominant Myth: Creating and Maintaining The Nuclear Family

It is commonly understood that the 'nuclear family' is so called due its perceived role as the central organizing unit of contemporary, Western society. The term is generally used to refer to a married, heterosexual couple with two children (one male and one female for preference), providing the basic nucleus around which all other elements of Western society circulate. Despite the overwhelming narrowness that this reductive naming makes explicit, the 'nuclear family' enjoys such a privileged mythical status that the word 'family' can often become synonymous with this single permutation. As with all myths, however, the 'nuclear family' has a context and a history that belies such a status.

Most accounts of the rise of the nuclear family to become the predominant model of family life in the Western world, at least conceptually if not in reality, posit a connection with a corresponding process of increasing industrialisation. The common logic goes that prior to the industrial revolution the primary function of the family was economic. Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (1998, p.57) characterises this "pre-industrial family" as:

“...essentially a relationship centred upon work and economics. Men and women, old and young people each had their own place and tasks within it. But at the same time their activities were closely coordinated with one another and subordinated to the common goal of preserving the farm or workshop....It was a tightly knit community in which little room was left for personal inclinations, feelings and motives. What counted was not the individual person but common goals and purposes. In this respect the preindustrial family may be defined as a ‘community of need’ held together by an ‘obligation of solidarity’”.

While her analysis may seem emotionally bleak to those of us steeped in the personal fulfilment mythology of the contemporary family, Beck-Gernsheim is far from alone in suggesting that its primary function prior to industrialization was economic. Judith Stacey (1996, p.39) suggests that the “modern family in the West developed historically out of a patriarchal, premodern family economy in which work and family life were thoroughly integrated”, while John Bernardes (1997, p.8) sums up this line of argument:

“Most analyses suggest that industrialisation involves a shift from rural extended families to isolated urban nuclear families. This shift mirrors the dramatic change in production techniques from patterns in agriculture and ‘outworking’ to labour concentrated in factories.”

Evidently it would be difficult, or at least unconventional, to argue the lack of any connection between the ascendance of the myth of the ‘nuclear family’ and the rise of industrialisation. That the vast majority of premodern families would have experienced a lesser degree of separation between their domestic and work lives than is common today seems inevitable when the demands of a predominantly agricultural, pre-industrial economy are taken into account. Without the regimented working hours made possible by factory employment family life would, through necessity, become subsumed within a more interwoven timetable of work and other aspects of life, with a less definite separation between the two. Similarly the separation between the domestic space (the prime site of family interaction) and the workspace (the site of

economic production) would have been, for the majority of people, less total than it became later.

Dating this shift from a predominantly rural, agricultural economy to a predominantly urban, industrial economy, however, is a potentially impossible task. Nevertheless, even a cursory glance at the literature that has attempted this gives us some idea not only how gradual this change would have been, with a consequent gradual change in the make-up of the family unit, but also how constant. R.W.

Connell (1995, p.186), for example, suggests that:

“In the period from about 1450 to about 1650 (the ‘long’ sixteenth century, in the useful phrase of the French historian Fernand Braudel) the modern capitalist economy came into being around the North Atlantic, and the modern gender order also began to take shape in the region.”

If Connell’s dating of the rise of modernity, and its ensuing gender order, is correct it would suggest two centuries of significant social change at least two centuries prior to the height of the industrial revolution and a further century before the commonly perceived height of the nuclear family’s cultural dominance in the 1950s. Already the wisdom of dividing the real, lived history of the family into two broad periods, the pre- and post-nuclear family era, is shown to be problematic.

While the profusion of analyses professing the connection between increased industrialization and urbanization and the rise of the nuclear family do constitute a convincing broader argument about the place of family life within people’s experience, it is important to realise that it is not the whole story. Indeed, the simple narrative of a shift from the extended, premodern family as the fundamental economic unit in Western society to the isolated, nuclear family as response to the increasing individualization of the wage-earning process, threatens to undermine the variations in the premodern family as much as the nuclear family myth potentially ignores variation in contemporary families. Mary S. Hartman suggests that historical

investigations into the family set-ups most common throughout Northwestern Europe actually disproved the popularly held thesis that

“...northwestern European households had once been multifamily ones like those in many other parts of the world, but had become ‘streamlined’ in the 19th century as a result of the new factory system, with its demand for a mobile work force....when compelling evidence turned up in the 1960s that nuclear households had dominated the region for hundreds of years before industrialization, this assumption was quietly dropped” (Hartman, 2004, p.12).

The fact that this assumption has not been “quietly dropped” among the rest of the humanities and, in fact, continues to constitute the perceived logic of the development of the family in the West perhaps says more about the contemporary myth of the nuclear family than it does about the lived reality of family life prior to its invention. While the rise of a capitalist economy and industrial work practices clearly did affect the way people organized and experienced family life, as it affected all other areas of their lives, the possibility must remain open that the premodern family cited in much of the literature is potentially more an invention of contemporary writing on the family, reverse-engineered to provide a context for the rise of the nuclear family model under analysis, than a comprehensive historical account. Perhaps the need for such a point of comparison suggests more about the establishment of the myth of the nuclear family than it does about the concrete changes in the history of the Western family.

Whilst the development of the nuclear family, as a family set-up intimately associated with modern industrial society, might be contentious the use of the term ‘nuclear family’, with all the surrounding mythology that it implies, is almost certainly a 20th century phenomenon. It is most commonly associated with the regulatory discourses of the humanities and social sciences and, reflecting the relative youth of these academic disciplines, can often become conflated with the broader concept of the family in general. Many of these disciplines posit the 1950s (in

America particularly) as a golden age of the nuclear family, with the majority of households made up of the wage-earning husband, a housewife and their young children.

Of course, most analysts could pinpoint the demographic and economic shifts that supported this reading: the post-war ‘baby boom’, increasingly affordable suburban housing and relatively high wages for a predominantly male workforce. Jay Winter attempts to unravel the connection between the major disruption of World War II and the revival of the family in post-war Europe by acknowledging the conservative appeal of reconstructing a patriarchal model of family to assuage the anxieties of war, commenting on the irony that, “A war that destroyed millions of families helped set in motion forces leading after 1945 to a revival of family life” (Winter, 2003, 172). Winter counsels against overstating the psychological impact of the war, however, as the primary motivator of a revival in family life, instead suggesting that:

“...the experience of war contributed to other forces independently leading to a rise in nuptiality and, through the marriage rate, to a rise in fertility. A multifaceted account of these developments is clearly indicated, given that the changes took place both in combatant and non-combatant countries” (Winter, 2003, p.172)

In America, this combination of factors also led to an undeniable resurgence of family life, with rising marriage rates, falling divorce rates (Weiss, 2000, p.4) and a post-war ‘baby boom’ seeing the average annual birth rate rising from 2.5 million in the 1930s to 4.5 million in the 1950s (Macunovich, 2002, p.63). The effect was as pronounced in Britain, where there was a rise from 700,000 births per year in the 1930s to 1 million in 1947 (Brass, 1989, p.14).

The increasing centrality of family life in the post-war era does not lead to simple conclusion that it was a reinstatement of a previous model of nuclear,

patriarchal family life that had held sway prior to being ruptured by war, however.

Casper and Bianchi (2002, p.xvii) suggest that,

“...changes in certain family behaviours can be exaggerated or minimized depending on whether one charts the trends from midcentury, when a unique set of demographic and economic circumstances prevailed (early marriage, early childbearing, unprecedented economic expansion), or from some other time point”.

This tendency to present the post-war ‘baby boom’ as return to both a demographic and conceptual model of nuclear family life, characterised by the separation of the economic and domestic sphere, that had preceded it has also questioned by Turner and Rennell. In their book, *When Daddy Came Home* (1995), they pinpoint 1945 as the year in which “family life changed forever” rather than the point at which previous models were reinstated, by focusing on the disparity between the expectations of the economically productive husband and father in the postwar family and the traumatic personal experiences of many returning servicemen and their families.

The absence of these men throughout the war, and the necessarily increased economic involvement of women, however, often threatens to obscure longer trends. In fact female employment had been steadily rising throughout the first half of the 20th century and the 1950s was no exception, suggesting that the male breadwinner role on which the economic survival of the nuclear family model is predicated was never the norm even during the era that has come to represent the form’s apotheosis. In fact, the labour force participation rate of married women in the United States more than doubled between 1900 and 1940 before doubling again between 1940 and 1960 (Brown, p.231) As Stephanie Coontz (1992, p.160) points out:

“At first glance, the 1950s represented a reassertion of female domesticity. But single women’s employment rose rapidly and the postwar baby boom merely created a backlog of supply-and-demand pressures that unleashed an explosion of employment among married women as the decade progressed.”

Nevertheless the nuclear family continues to provide the starting point for most contemporary analysis. Whether they speak the rhetoric of family values or espouse the gospel of liberal pluralism most analysts use the nuclear family to establish their position, such is its dominant cultural power. Beck-Gernsheim (1998, p54) comments on the irony inherent in much of this analysis suggesting that:

“Many theorists perceive massive changes, perhaps even the end of the traditional family; others criticize what they call the constant talk of crisis and argue that the future belongs with the family; while a third group, lying somewhere in between, prefer to speak of tendencies towards pluralism. What makes the debate particularly stimulating is the fact that all appeal to empirical data, and especially to demographic statistics.”

If we combine Hartman’s argument concerning the historical precedent for the nuclear family in northwestern Europe with Beck-Gernsheim’s analysis of contemporary discourse on the family within the social sciences, it comes as no surprise that it is possible to use empirical data and demographic statistics to support an argument for either the inevitable death or survival of the nuclear model. If Hartman is right in suggesting a historical precedent for the relative dominance of the nuclear family historically then demographic studies that make assumptions about the prevalence of this model should be able to find evidence to support them, as it has long been a common family form. Whether they historically contextualise these assumptions or use them to ‘prove’ a link between this specific form and an industrialized economy, however, depends on the motivations behind the particular study.

Interestingly, many contemporary studies of the family have chosen to focus on the way in which contemporary family forms differ from the nuclear model. The rhetoric of the ‘family in crisis’ has become commonplace in much of the literature in the field. The legacy of the demographic shift away from the comfortable perception

of the nuclear family that provided the starting point for all analysis in the 1950s was an awareness of the contested nature of the ideology and practice of family life becoming common across a number of disciplines. From specific feminist challenges (Segal, 1983; Gittins 1985) to broader political philosophy (Abbott, 1981), from explorations of alternative forms (Gordon, 1972) to the impact of policy in creating those forms (Morgan, 1995), attempts to understand the shift away from the anomalous hegemony of the nuclear model in the 1950s, both culturally and demographically, were raising questions about the very nature of the family itself. The rhetoric of “crisis” that had been increasingly applied to explorations of the family, just as it had been applied to explorations of masculinity in the wake of feminism, has become so ingrained that almost all the constituent parts of the family have experience their own crisis as this analysis has progressed. In addition to the ‘masculinity crisis’ of the 1990s, work has been produced on the ‘crisis’ in marriage (Storkey, 1996; Shumway, 2003) and in childhood (Scruton, 1997), both of which extend from, and contribute to the ongoing debates, about changes in family life.

What most of these studies are really referring to, more accurately, is *a* family in crisis, specifically the nuclear model. Here it is possible to, once again, see the conflation of the entire concept of ‘the family’ with the narrower concept of the ‘nuclear family’. As Beck-Gernsheim (1998, p.54) points out, however, many of these studies are also able to call on demographic statistics to prove their various points about the decline of a dominant model and could not, therefore, be said to be intrinsically mistaken in some of their major arguments. Where they are often potentially flawed, however, is in the lack of historical context for these arguments. For instance, one study cited in an article that attempts to provide a “historical perspective” on fatherhood (Smith, 1994, p.24) suggests that “maternal employment”

in Britain has risen from just 8% in the 1950s to 55% in the 1990s, while “paternal involvement in practical infant care” has risen from 39% to 82.5% in the same period. This particular study does, at first glance, suggest a trend away from the single-breadwinner set-up of which most definitions of the nuclear family are comprised, with a corresponding increase in the parental involvement of fathers. But, by using the 1950s as its starting point, the study compares all of the proceeding decades with a decade in which the nuclear model was arguably at its most demographically prevalent, thus a rise in maternal employment could be seen as inevitable and the original sample group as the anomaly. In this case the demographic statistics are also being asked to prove a ‘positive’ point about family change and parental interaction in the preceding decades, while simultaneously being undermined when Smith (1994, p.24) goes on to say that “Tests show no statistically significant relationship between these two variables”, pre-empting the obvious statistical conclusion that the increased economic involvement of women has led to increasing parental involvement of men and complicating the use of such studies to demonstrate changes in family life.

Nevertheless, the methods of the study itself, and its possible use as ‘proof’ of a demographic shift, still benefit from further interrogation. Historical perspective, of the type provided by Hartman’s analysis, would help to place the statistics within their proper context. For instance, as with many other studies, there is the danger that by providing results from a relatively narrow timescale the interpretation of those results will fail to consider the difference in family set-ups before that time. The potentially unspoken assumption becomes that the single-breadwinner set-up, where the mother stays at home, is the base state that has been interrupted by the increased economic involvement of women. In essence, the 1950s stands in for all the preceding decades for which we receive no recorded information. There is a danger

that this not only minimises the history of dual-breadwinner families, which may well have been the norm over the centuries, but also minimises the significant 8% of mothers who were earning during the 1950s as well as the equally significant 45% of mothers who did not work in the 1990s cohort. The story becomes the significant rise in working mothers since the 1950s rather than the relative historical anomaly of the non-economically productive wife and mother or, indeed, the diversity that exists within each cohort.

Equally, as with many studies which utilise demographic statistics to make an argument about changes in family life, specifics can easily be extrapolated into generalizations. In this case only one aspect of the mother's role within the family (her economic productivity) and one aspect of the father's role (his parental involvement with infant care) are recorded. While Smith is at pains to argue what she sees as a lack of connection between the two trends the very inclusion of the study in an article offering a historical perspective on fatherhood comments on the dominant narrative of the economically unproductive wife and parentally uninvolved father, through the unspoken assumptions behind the study. Indeed, if, as it is suggested, the obvious connection the study implies is non-existent, it is difficult to see that its inclusion in the article does much else. While Smith uses these results to support what could be considered a broadly positive thesis (the increased involvement of fathers in infant care) the way in which she uses them reinforces the dominant cultural myth of the nuclear family with its separate spheres of economic productivity and domesticity. The nuclear family becomes the base state, deviation from which becomes the narrative of family development in the second half of the 20th century, rather than the nuclear family itself developing from a previous range of diverse family set-ups. Smith also comments on the way in which this particular study ignores racial

difference, commenting on the fact that, “Information on ethnic group was not asked for, so it is not possible to say how representative the sample was on this parameter”, although she does suggest that the cohort questioned was fairly evenly split in terms of class (Smith, 1994, p.23). Smith’s highly tentative use of this study, and her acknowledgement of its limitations, alert us to the difficulty in which examining family change in relation to a singular, nuclear model can result. As Beishon *et al* (1998, p.1) propose,

“Ethnic minority families are a genuine diversity; there are important points of contrast between them and the White majority, as well between different minority groups. This diversity is sometimes implicitly or explicitly taken to be problematic, as if approximation to the behaviour of the White British is morally worthy or a sign of progress, and variation from the behaviour is deviant”.

The glossing over of this potential point of difference by the study cited by Smith suggests that not only can a monolithic model of family life be used as a point of reference against which alternative models influenced by ethnicity can be judged as improper, but also that this model may indeed be so monolithic as to subsume all difference.

Studies such as this one, which, either deliberately or unthinkingly, propose the nuclear family as the benchmark against which family deviation is measured, could also be said to exhibit an irony underpinning the myth of the nuclear family itself. The early 20th century saw a significant rise in the presence of the humanities and social sciences within the academy, with the development and dissemination of such human-centred sciences as sociology, psychoanalysis and anthropology. This coincided in the Western world with a short period of relative homogeneity in the set-up of the family within a specific industrialized context. Putting aside the many practical concerns about the size and selection of particular cohorts, the historical context in which such an increased interest in the family as an object of study

flourished would have inevitably shaped the focus of this study from the very beginning. As David Cheal (1991, p.3) suggests,

“The nostalgic feelings for family life as it existed in the 1950s that are found today among some sociologists are strengthened by an image of unity and certainty in sociological theory, which also existed at the time”.

That the nuclear family (which almost exclusively provided the control model against which deviation was measured) had a history beyond that immediate historical context was not necessarily factored into much of the research of the early to mid-20th century. The social changes that effected the make-up of the family during the second half of the 20th century and beyond, therefore, would appear to be dismantling a formation which had existed, if not forever, then at least since the family had become a common object of study. The irony is that the nuclear family may have been enshrined as a myth of ‘traditional’ family life at a juncture in history when that particular formation was becoming most untenable. A Foucauldian reading may well suggest that the entry of the nuclear family into discourse was dependent on this historical condition, implicitly reflecting, and maybe even to some degree aiding, this social shift.

Taking into account the intense debates surrounding the historical and social precedents for the nuclear family as the predominant family form in the Western world, the question of how and why the *myth* of the nuclear family became dominant, despite such diversity in people’s lived experiences of family life, becomes more relevant.

It has been suggested, quite convincingly at points, that the success of the nuclear family may be partially rooted in its biological functionalism. The work of Talcott Parsons, described by David Cheal (1991, p.5-4) as “The principal architect of the sociological model of the ‘isolated nuclear family’”, built upon earlier examples

of structural functionalist sociology, in which social institutions must “ensure the well-being not only of individuals, but also of the society upon which those individuals depend” (Cheal, 1991, p.4). Within a Parsonian structural functionalist account:

“...the basic and irreducible function of the family are two: first, the primary socialisation of children so that they can truly become members of the society into which they have been born; second the stabilization of the adult personalities of the population of the society.” (Parsons, 1956, p.16)

It is easy to imagine the conceptual leap from this definition of the role of the family to the assumption that the nuclear family is ideally placed to fulfil these four functions. Once the focus of the family becomes the reproduction and rearing of the young, sexual reproduction becomes a prerequisite in constituting any family as defined by these criteria. By this definition the smallest possible unit necessary for the reproductive process, at the heart of this concept of the family, to take place is a heterosexual couple. Hence the nuclear family, as an attempt to describe the most basic sociological conditions under which family life becomes possible, must begin with this assumption. Of course, the question immediately becomes; how did the *smallest* possible unit become conflated with the *ideal* unit?

Talcott Parsons hugely influential sociological analysis of the nuclear family once again suggests a relationship between industrialization and the ascendance of the nuclear family model. Cheal neatly summarises Parsons’ arguments thusly:

“He claimed that that conjugal or nuclear family is the only type of family that does not conflict with the requirements of the industrial economy....Consisting of husband, wife and children (if any), it is small enough to be highly mobile. Furthermore the obligations of family members to kin outside the nuclear family are held to be separated from occupational commitments, and thus individuals are relatively free from kinship pressures at work.” (Cheal, 1991, p.5)

Before we go too far in blaming Parsons structural functionalist approach for the significant emphasis placed on the nuclear family in sociological analysis, however,

Cheal reminds us that his analysis offered less validation for the nuclear model, or indeed the family in general, than may be supposed. While it is apparent that he the nuclear model that he was observing did fulfil certain specific functions within society that alternative forms may not, thus increasing its demographic and cultural presence, he also acknowledged the fact that this removed other social functions from falling under the province of the family, most notably the spheres of economic production and employment. This means that while Parsons' work comments on, and supports, the dominant position of the nuclear model in sociological discourse of the family, he is also aware of the way the family has diminished in other discourses, making the family "a more specialized agency" (Parsons, 1956, p.9).

In this brief summary of Parsons' thinking on the family we see the unique historical perspective that complicated such analysis in the first half of the 20th century. At precisely the same time as the family, and the nuclear model in particular, was being demographically quantified and validated through the humanities and social sciences, the function and importance of the institution more generally was changing due to the economic and social change occurring during the period in which the work was being undertaken.

One of the most significant shifts pinpointed by Parsons, amongst many other theorists, was the shift away from the family as an economically productive unit and towards the family as the site of personal fulfilment. This is perhaps the most unambiguous of the contrasts that are commonly drawn in the dichotomy between the premodern and modern family, as well as being potentially the most important as regards people's lived experiences of family life.

The separation of the family from the sphere of economic production alters the function of the family quite significantly. As Tony Chapman (2004, p.10) suggests:

“...it is clear that the contemporary household is primarily a unit of consumption rather than production: that is, income is gained from economic activities that take place away from the home, or at least the source of economic gain is monetary even if householder’s work at home.”

The family becomes a site not only for the consumption of goods and services but also for the consumption of something altogether less tangible: personal emotional fulfilment. Instead of being bonded to other family members through what Beck-Gersheim’s (1998) terms an “obligation of solidarity” family members are now bonded to each other through what she calls “elective affinities” and a continued choice becomes necessary for these bonds to be maintained.

Perhaps this goes some way to explaining the need for a cultural myth of the nuclear family to be projected so constantly and consistently? Perhaps people need to be provided with motivation to continue choosing the family by being reminded how emotionally fulfilling, or at the very least how ‘normal’ a state it is to live in, if the institution is to survive? That much of the work done on the demographics of the family charts people’s increasing rejection of this model once again suggests that the nuclear family became discursively powerful at precisely the moment at which the social power of the institution itself actually began to decline. While much of the rhetoric of the ‘family in crisis’ bemoans people turning away from the nuclear family model, the statistics and arguments that are utilised do seem to demonstrate a significant demographic shift away from this model. If Mary Hartman’s convincing historical analysis is to be believed, perhaps the most significant shift away from this model that the West has seen in centuries.

Extricating ourselves from this seemingly endless debate about the demographics of both the premodern and modern family (a debate which seems to suggest that a pluralist approach may be the only sane one if statistics can be found to support all side's arguments as has been suggested) and consequent attempts to prove or disprove the validity of one family form over the other, the shift away from Beck-Gernsheim's (1998) "obligation of solidarity" towards "elective affinities" may be the most fundamental and the most influential shift in both the lived reality *and* the mythology of the contemporary family. Certainly, with the separation of family life from the sphere of economic production, which seems to be a fairly consistent trend whatever the actual demographics of the family under discussion, family life becomes a choice rather than a necessity and people's expectations of it have adjusted accordingly.

Historian John Tosh (1999, p.13) suggests that,

"The Victorian middle-class domestic unit represented the final and most decisive stage in the long process whereby the rationale of the Western family shifted from being primarily economic to become sentimental and emotional. More specifically, it reflected a steadily increasing separation of work and home" (13).

The "Victorian middle-class domestic unit" he refers to would have, in all likelihood, demographically resembled the nuclear family model, with an economically productive husband and economically dependent wife constituting the heterosexual coupling at the centre of a broader domestic arrangement, which may well have included children, other relatives or domestic servants. While the make-up of the household may have deviated from the simplicity of the strictly nuclear set-up, it is unlikely that its involvement with economic productivity would have done so. Once again, we encounter a convincing argument about the effect of industrialisation on people's conception of family life, without the need to extrapolate this effect to prove the ascendancy, or indeed any sense of correctness, of the nuclear model. Once family

life has been removed from the sphere of economic productivity, as largely happened with the rise of industrial working practices, people looked for something different from their experience of family. Tosh's choice of words when characterising the new rationale of the family for the Victorian middle classes, "sentimental and emotional", suggests that they looked for a sense of personal fulfilment far less tangible than the economic well being that had previously constituted a successful family life.

Through identifying the common threads in all of these stories about the development of the nuclear family, a narrative about the meaning of the family in people's lives and in cultural mythology becomes fairly apparent, even if a true, incontrovertible picture of demographic change, or indeed demographic stasis, does not. Even if the differences between the premodern and nuclear family in reality potentially elude us, the major shift from a family system based around economic need to a system based around emotional fulfilment seems to be a fairly common and a fairly sound thesis. Most theorists agree that the premodern, or pre-industrial, family was held together by economic necessity, whatever coherence or plurality they credit it with in terms of formation. Equally, most theorists tend to agree that industrialization had a major effect on the way in which family life was lived, separating the home from the sphere of economic production and valorising a romantic relationship as the heart of the family unit.

While there are problems with the traditional narrative of the growth of the nuclear family as intimately tied to the process of industrialization, not least Hartman's historical argument suggesting a strong precedent for the prevalence of the nuclear set-up in the pre-industrial era, its dominance as the most common, or at least ideal, myth of family life in the West certainly seems to owe something to the historical conditions under which it was disseminated. Among the many possible

reasons for this ascendance it is important for us not to entirely dismiss the idea that it did in fact become a more common form of family life as the process of industrialization progressed. It certainly seems possible, if not entirely probable, that the separation of work from the domestic sphere, improvements in the availability and quality of housing, a rise in state welfare programs, better health and education, increased urbanization and mobility, amongst many other factors, would have encouraged smaller family units living in increasingly separate households.

Certainly Parson's description of the nuclear family as the ideal form for a functioning industrialized society is echoed in its ascendance to become the mythical ideal of family life in such societies. While the family may not be a predominantly economically productive unit in industrialised society it is still economically important in a consuming role. In this role, smaller, separate units, each requiring the purchase of goods and services to maintain a functioning household create a larger market for the fruits of industrial production. Equally it seems likely that the increase in physical and economic comforts produced by this arrangement would change the expectations and meaning of family life.

Without the economic impetus enjoyed by the pre-industrial family, the modern family becomes dependent on the emotional well being it can provide its members for its survival. Rather than being bound by economic ties the members of a family in an industrial society are bound together by a mixture of social conventions and personal choice. The romantic relationship between a husband and wife becomes reified as the emotional core of the unit and the two-parent ideal becomes central to the nuclear family, not only because of the economic advantages that both the single and dual breadwinner families enjoy, but also because it validates the suggestion of the family as the site of personal, emotional fulfilment. At this point the myth and the

reality of the nuclear family become inextricably interwoven and we can see how each one informs the other. If one accepts the demographic ascendance of the nuclear family in industrialised societies, explained by a Parsonian reading of the nuclear family as the ideal form for the successful functioning of such a society, then the accompanying ascendance of the myth would naturally arise as expression of both what is best and, put simply, what *is*. If, on the other hand, one interrogates the myth as more pervasive than the demographic reality, it is possible to suggest that the ascendance of the myth can be explained as attempt to promote the family as both necessary and preferable in an era when it must be increasingly chosen, rather than simply accepted as a necessity. As the family becomes a site for consumption, rather than economic production, the myth of the nuclear family itself becomes the first product that must be consumed.

So what of the rhetoric of crisis and the seemingly endless arguments purporting to demonstrate the decline of the nuclear family? While one must be careful to read between the lines of any argument that attempts to demonstrate simplistic trends in the make-up of the family without paying attention to both the historical and contemporary plurality of experiences, the sheer number of such arguments suggests that the cultural dominance of the nuclear family myth, at the very least, is under threat. The irony of the nuclear family's ascendance to become the dominant myth of the Western, industrialized family may well be that, in its reification of emotional well-being as the motivation for remaining in the family, it created an expectation of family life that many people's experience failed to meet. As outlined above, the nuclear family may or may not, have existed in reality for centuries through necessity but at the very moment at which it was quantified and disseminated as a form of family life so prevalent and so ideal to industrialized

society that it could become almost interchangeable with the concept of family as a whole, it was potentially facing the biggest challenges to its existence. While the myth of the nuclear family may retain a great deal of cultural power, the limits of that power to influence behaviour are exposed by the constant attention paid to its apparent dismantling. The question arises; at the precise point in history when people were being asked to choose family life for emotional fulfilment rather than experiencing it as an economic necessity, and the nuclear family was being consistently sold to them as the ideal, and acceptable, way in which to achieve this, why did so many decide to choose something different?

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Nuclear Disarmament: Feminism and Other Mythological Challenges.

All too often victims of rather obvious scapegoating, feminism and the process of women's liberation are regularly identified as the main culprit behind the decline of the 'traditional' family. While this tends to reveal more about the prejudices of those doing the scapegoating, rather than any concrete evidence which suggests female emancipation to be the driving force behind changes in the make-up of the family, it would be naive to suggest that the changing social and economic roles of women in Western societies had not had a profound effect on certain relationships which form the core of the nuclear family unit. Feminist critique that deals intelligently with the position of women in society is bound to focus attention on the family, not least because the concept of the domestic sphere as the key site in which both family and femininity are enacted conflates the experience of family and womanhood and makes the former an essential, if not *the* essential, experience through which the latter is defined.

The separation of economic productivity from the domestic sphere, which characterised the experience of family life in industrialised, capitalist societies and culminated in the ideal of the nuclear family unit, is perhaps the single most important process that defined the overarching gender order of contemporary Western societies. John Tosh (1999, p.17) suggests the ideal of separate spheres for men and women grew as the Victorian middle-classes moved away from the manufacturing bases of the larger cities leading to a situation in which;

“The most critical precondition of middle-class domesticity was the withdrawal of the wife from direct involvement in the productive work of the household. The idea of a marital working partnership was virtually at an end among the Victorian bourgeoisie. Once breadwinning had been removed from the home, it soon came to be accepted that wives should have nothing to do with it.”

While it may not have held true for lower-class families in the same era it is clear that, for the middle-class arbiters of taste, the Victorian era saw the culmination of a shift towards the separation of work and domestic life that had corresponded with the rise of capitalist economies and the industrialisation of working practices throughout Northwestern Europe. The immense economic success of these countries at this point in history must also have gone some way towards validating this separation. It must have been very easy to imagine that the incredible pace of industrialisation and the accompanying prosperity of the region were, at least to some degree, predicated on this shift in family life. A more accurate view may be a reversal of this process, suggesting that the shift in family life was predicated on the economic and industrial changes sweeping the region at the time. In either analysis the family remains inextricably linked with the continued success of capitalist, industrial economics, either as cause or reflection of that prosperity. Unsurprisingly given this specific set of circumstances, as the family became further removed from the sphere of economic

production it arguably increased in rhetorical importance, culminating in the idea of the nuclear family as the fundamental organizing unit of a capitalist society.

Once again, we see the delicate position that the family must adopt within a capitalist, industrial economy. As the bonds that bring a family together become based less on economic necessities and other practical considerations they are, in theory, replaced by emotional bonds, chosen to fulfil the needs of the individuals they bind together. The appearance of the nuclear family as a myth of good family practice, as it were, becomes necessary to guide people's choices and convince them to remain in an institution that is no longer a prerequisite for economic survival. Freedom from the economic ties that bound preindustrial families together does not necessarily entail the discursive plurality one might expect were the institution to become one in which people attempt to find their ultimate expression, perhaps even making the choice not to engage with the institution at all. Instead the family as a cultural concept is quantified, and an ideal enshrined, as never before, suggesting a conceptual coherence that could never be borne out in experience. As the family becomes less important to the economic well being of society its cultural importance grows, extolling the institutions virtues and creating more rigid roles, and a space in which these roles are enacted, for men and women.

The separation of the domestic and public spheres is central to this process as it demarcates not only the sites in which family and public life are lived, but through gendered associations, the sites in which masculinity and femininity are enacted. The fact that, as Tosh (1991, p.5) suggests, women were some of the "best-known propagandists for domesticity" and that they were at the forefront of "the intensification of the domestic ideal during this period" shows how intimately family life had become tied to the ideal of femininity. He also identifies a contradiction

between the limiting of women's role within society and the growth of their power within the household:

“The range of activities open to women became narrower, and their access to the public sphere more restricted. On the other hand, since most middle-class women were wives and mothers before anything else, the greater prestige attached to these roles tended to raise the status of women, and to endow them with greater moral authority.” (Tosh, 1991, p.5)

This conflation of domesticity and moral authority certainly seems to define much of the ideal of Victorian femininity, culminating in the ideal of the ‘angel in the house’, a image of the happily subservient wife and mother drawn from Coventry Patmore's (1903) popular poetic tribute to his own wife and going on to become a common ideal of Victorian domestic femininity.

No sooner had the gendered logic of separate spheres of experience reached its discursive height, however, than its critics began to investigate the inherent inequalities that underpinned it. That the same culture which gave rise to the rigid separation of the masculine and feminine spheres should give rise to what has become known as the ‘first wave’ of feminism suggests the high stakes built into the building and dissemination of myth. Once again, we may want to turn to a Foucauldian analysis of this discursive moment and suggest that attempts to quantify and control the set-up of the family were not simply a set of repressive limitations placed on people's experience, but were, in fact, reflecting an increasing concern with the mechanics of family living which would have been arguably unnecessary in a period in which family groups were an economic necessity. The same increasing concern would simultaneously make questioning of such dominant myths possible. Once the family becomes a site for personal, emotional fulfilment rather than economic production, the expectations of its members increased correspondingly. That many women would not have been fulfilled by the narrowing of their role to ‘angel of the

house' is unsurprising but the cultural logic of separate spheres and the pre-eminence of the nuclear family continued to gain prominence, throughout the 19th century and the first half of the 20th, regardless of these dissenting voices.

At the heart of the institution of the nuclear family is the concept of the companionate marriage between a husband and wife. While one might reasonably expect a companionate marriage, based on emotional connection, to be more equal than a marriage motivated by economic or social factors alone, numerous feminist analyses of the institution have argued that this is not the case. Simone De Beauvoir (1988, p.448) suggests that marriage has always been an exchange of women by men:

“...the girl seems absolutely passive; she *is* married, *given* in marriage by her parents. Boys *get* married, they *take* a wife. They look to marriage for an enlargement, a confirmation of their existence, but not the mere right to exist; it is a charge they assume voluntarily”.

While De Beauvoir's analysis covers both the premodern and modern contexts, the strength of her words suggests that she would see little difference between a system based on arranged marriages, in which an exchange involving dowries and similar economic provisions turned women into commodities with a literal exchange value, and a system based on companionate marriage, in which there is the illusion of choice. For De Beauvoir marriage is a necessity for women for it is the only means by which they can adopt a position in relation to a patriarchal society. As the above quote suggests, a woman's very existence within such a society is primarily predicated on having a man to mediate between her own powerless position and a male-dominated society. Marriage for men, on the other hand, is undertaken for entirely different reasons. While, as De Beauvoir suggests, marriage has often been seen as an important feature of a coherent masculine identity within Western society; offering a “confirmation of their existence”, it is still possible for men to interact with society without the mediation of a partner. While De Beauvoir's arguments are

perhaps too totalising to claim to represent the huge diversity of married women's experience, one only needs to think of the huge difference in the different levels of respect traditionally afforded the figure of the 'swinging bachelor' and the 'old maid' to see the underlying truth of her argument in the way in which marriage is conceived differently for men and women. Equally, one need only recall the stereotype of the commitment-phobic man being 'tied down' by his marriage-hungry partner to remind oneself of the differing motivations for marriage that are commonly perceived for men and women. As divorce rates have risen and marriage has come to be seen as less of a social necessity than a personal choice it has been argued that Western men have been increasingly encouraged to avoid marriage; an unnecessary economic burden that may endanger the very sense of personal fulfilment that it should, theoretically, help to realise (Erenrieck, 1983; Kimmel, 2008; Cross, 2008). A corresponding shift in attitudes towards unmarried women has been slow to appear however, with the huge growth of what Ingraham (1999, pp.25-75) calls the 'wedding-industrial complex', primarily marketed towards women, providing just one example of the way in which marriage is still considered eminently desirable for women.

Despite this, some statistical studies suggest that married men gain more health benefits and a greater sense of personal well-being than their unmarried counterparts, while women are actually likely to be less healthy and less fulfilled if they are married than if they are not. (McRae Jr. and Brodie, 1989; Kim and McKenry, 2002; Felder, 2006) While these controversial statistical studies may raise more questions than they answer, what they do prove, at the very least, is the yawning gap between the actual and the perceived benefits of marriage for men and for women. Clearly De Beauvoir's analysis of marriage being conceived as central to

feminine identity persists despite the challenges to this ideal presented by the pronounced changes in the position of women in Western societies in the 20th, and 21st, centuries.

The separation of the feminine domestic sphere from the masculine sphere of economic productivity was challenged by the continually growing presence of women within the workforce. While it should be taken into account that women in economically productive families in the premodern era, or in families where economic or class position required two working partners to sustain them, have always played an important role in the productivity of a society it is most likely the unit that would have been regarded as productive rather than the individual. By removing work from the home and enshrining it in a separate sphere mostly inhabited by men, however, one of the key functions of the patriarch, provision, becomes his sole responsibility. Consequently, his partner has no control over the economic well being of the family unit and becomes almost entirely dependent. While this stark separation has never been totalising, and is itself dependent on the provision of a living wage not afforded all strata of society, its position as a guiding economic principle in Western society is demonstrated by the stubborn gap between men's and women's wages (Joshi and Paci, 1998; Shackleton, 2008) and the relative levels of poverty often experienced by those women who find themselves the sole-provider of their own family unit (Rowlingson and McKay, 2002, pp.14-15).

As women's presence within the industrialised workforce increased, however, the protectionist nature of this guiding principle was threatened. The feminist impulse, that it could be argued arose out of the more general pervasiveness of Enlightenment liberalism in the West and had led to the beginnings of a sustained analysis of the inequalities of the gender order, gained added weight from the steady

breakdown of such an important sustaining principle. The increasing influence of feminism from the 1950s to the end of the 1970s coincided with the culmination of several key trends that had begun in the 19th century, and had been potentially hastened by two global conflicts, greater opportunities for education and legislative changes, leading to a situation in which female employment was steadily becoming the norm rather than the exception. Without the need for a man to mediate for women economically it was natural that the institution that, at least partially, relied on this situation to sustain it would begin to be questioned.

One of the key works of second wave feminism was Betty Freidan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), which discussed the lack of fulfilment experienced by many middle-class suburban housewives, many of whose lives could have been considered to outwardly match the then contemporary 'ideal' of nuclear family living, and demonstrated the central place that family held in defining feminine identity. A few years later, Germaine Greer (1999, p.248) also commented on the irony inherent in the cultural dominance of the nuclear family compared to the institution's actual ability to sustain a patriarchal society:

"The family which is set up when a young man installs his bride in a self-contained dwelling is not really well-designed to perform the functions of ensuring paternity. The wife is left alone most of the day without chaperone: the degree of trust demanded is correspondingly greater. The modern household has neither servants nor relatives to safeguard the husband's interest and yet is seems natural and proper, as the logical outcome of all the other patriarchal forms that have preceded it."

She also pinpoints the effect that women's increased involvement in the world of work has on the ability of many women to adopt the role of housewife suggesting that: "The working girl who marries, works for a period after her marriage and retires to breed, is hardly equipped for the isolation of the nuclear household" (Greer, 1999, 252). As the economic ability to "retire to breed" became harder to achieve for many

couples a greater questioning of the functionality of the nuclear family would seem inevitable. Much of the above analysis supports Greer's thesis that that the success of the nuclear family relied on a strange acceptance of being "natural and proper" almost *despite* its potential inability to fulfil the tasks with which it is charged. While Hartman, amongst other historians, may take issue with Greer's assertion that "the *nuclear* [sic] family is possibly the shortest-lived familial system ever developed" (Greer, 1999, p.248), it certainly seems as if the 'nuclear family' as the dominant *mythology* of family life in the West contained the seed of its own deconstruction.

By removing the sphere of economic productivity from the sphere of family life the productive part of family member's individual identities, both male and female, are to some degree separated from their identity within the family. While masculine identities remain tied to economic productivity to a much greater degree, as we shall see later, feminine identity becomes almost entirely intertwined with their role within the family. As economic necessity, as well as an attempt to escape the frustrations portrayed by feminist thinkers such as De Beauvoir, Friedan and Greer amongst many others, shifts women out of the home, this feminine identity must necessarily shift with them. By creating a myth of the family as a site of personal fulfilment economic changes will lead to, at the very least, a frustration with the inability of people's lives to reflect a myth that seemingly offers such a coherent identity and, as an inevitable consequence, a questioning of the myth itself.

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The Psychoanalytic Discourse of the Family: Pathologising and Recognising Difference

A similar interplay of the naturalization of the nuclear family model, on the mythical level, and its simultaneous deconstruction can be observed in the way in

which psychoanalysis has theorised family relationships and the variety of feminist responses to such theories. Freudian psychoanalysis places family relationships at the heart of many of the most fundamental processes of the development of the self. The totalising impulse behind many of his theories, however, must be placed into context. As John Tosh (1999, p.5) suggests:

“Freud’s work was essentially a commentary on the pathology of European urban domesticity, the only family system he knew well (which is one reason why his claims to universality must be handled with caution)”.

The main thrust of the psychoanalytic project, to return the psyche to some kind of state of ‘normal’ functioning, implicitly suggests a sense of ‘correct’ and ‘incorrect’ psychological development that often fails to account for the ultimately very specific social context in which these parameters were defined. As such, some of the central theories which attempt to explain the way in which ‘normal’ gendered identities are formulated, of which the Oedipus Complex would be perhaps the most famous, inadvertently reify the nuclear family as the natural state from the which the psyche develops.

At the heart of Freudian ideas about the development of the self lies the relationship between the child and the parent and, by extension, the relationship between the parents themselves. The theory of the Oedipus Complex discusses the creation of heterosexual desire, beginning with the child’s desire to possess the parent of the opposite sex and eliminate the parent of the same sex and resolved by the child’s identification with the same-sex parent and partial separation from the opposite-sex parent. The opposite-sex parent is then rediscovered as an adult sex object. For this to work as a true, ‘correct’ model of the way in which children’s gendered identities are formulated both heterosexuality and the nuclear family model must be accepted as ‘natural’ states to be achieved through the smooth functioning of

this process as it relies upon the two parent, small family set-up of the nuclear model. The simplicity of this theory could be easily complicated by the inclusion of grandparents or siblings in this process, or even more dramatically by a simple switch from the assumed female primary caregiver to a male one. While it may be difficult to write off Freud's ideas entirely it is equally difficult to accept them as the totalising explanations of the development of the self that they were, potentially, intended to be. Even if we accept the Oedipus Complex as Freud outlines it, it really becomes an explanation of the creation of heterosexual desire within the traditional nuclear, single-breadwinner family, dependent on a specific context and specific value judgements.

Before we do Freud too much of a disservice, however, it is important to recognise the motivation behind his work, and the continuing impact it has had on both popular and academic thought about the family. Freud's work on the family may be context specific but it was motivated by attempts to resolve the issues that his patients experienced through the disruption of what he saw as these 'normal' processes of psychological development. In this sense Freud, and his fellow psychoanalysts, made an important contribution to the entry of problematic accounts of nuclear family life into discourse. While it is possible to justifiably criticise Freudian psychoanalysis for some of the assumptions which underpin the field it is important to realise that Freud's, and his follower's, attempts to explain the psychological systems which underpinned the nuclear family of the late 19th and early 20th century placed the family, as a unit, under analysis as never before. Once again, we see the process by which the historical culmination of the trend towards the nuclear family led, simultaneously, to its mythological dominance and its deconstruction. While Freud's work may assume the 'naturalness' of both

heterosexuality and the nuclear family set-up it simultaneously offers some of the most useful tools with which we can investigate the way in which these institutions function.

Certainly much feminist work has mined the rich vein of Freudian and psychoanalytic theory to investigate the role of women in society, and in the family more particularly, either developing or rejecting some of the discipline's accepted ideas. Nancy Chodorow (1998), for example, offers a psychoanalytic analysis of the way in which Western notions of motherhood are passed down from generation to generation. While Freud focused heavily on the physicality of male and female subjects shaping their position within the family, through concepts such as penis envy, Chodorow questions these simple connections between the physical body and the social role of women. Instead she offers a less totalising, more deconstructive reading of the process of the "reproduction of mothering" which foregrounds the psychological processes, arguing that:

"...the contemporary reproduction of mothering occurs through social structurally induced psychological processes. It is neither a product of biology nor of intentional role-training. I draw on the psychoanalytic account of male and female personality development to demonstrate that women's mothering reproduces itself cyclically. Women, as mothers, produce daughters with mothering capacities and the desire to mother. These capacities are built into and grow out of the mother-daughter relationship itself. By contrast, women as mothers (and men as not-mothers) produce sons whose nurturant capacities and needs have been systematically curtailed and repressed. This prepares men for their less affective family role, and for primary participation in the impersonal extra-familial world of work and public life."
(Chodorow, 1998, p.7)

While Chodorow's analysis still focuses primarily on the nuclear family, she chooses to focus on the way on which this set-up is reproduced through the gendered psychological process of parenting rather than attributing its formation to the psychological identities that result from different biological genders, thus implying that the arrangement is constructed rather than natural. Where Chodorow's account

differs importantly from Freud's, however, is the relative authority afforded to the father and the mother in the reproduction of their roles in their offspring. Whereas Freud assumes a high degree of paternal authority, that must provide an object of identification for male children and provide an object of attraction for female children in order for the Oedipal triangle to be resolved, Chodorow reverses the relative importance of the genders. In her account, the mother is the parent with the primary responsibility for child-care within the nuclear family. This results in identification by female children, who grow, she argues, to have more "permeable ego boundaries" and "define themselves more in relation to others" (Chodorow, 1998, p. 93). Male children, on the other hand, are urged to identify with the father, who represents, in his relative absence from the parenting process, differentiation of self, society and culture.

Chodorow is not alone in her thinking. Other feminists have similarly looked to the psychological processes behind the way in which the nuclear family traditionally delineates the care of infants along gendered lines to explain the patriarchal nature of our society. Dorothy Dinnerstein (1991, p.28), for example, describes it as the "deepest root of our acquiescence to the maiming and mutual imprisonment of men and women". Following Freud, these thinkers place the parent-child relationship at very centre of the psychological creation of gendered subjectivities. This, perhaps even more so than the mythology of the companionate marriage, is the core of the myth of the nuclear family. By defining the processes by which the nuclear family sustains its own existence it suggests an impossibility of escape from these processes if one wishes to achieve a coherent psychological identity. In a sense, it could be argued that Freud and early psychoanalysts pathologised alternative models of identity formation that may have taken place

outside of the nuclear family. What the feminists who followed in their wake showed, however, was that these theories could be developed and deconstructed to show how such assumptions were themselves created and accepted as societal norms.

Feminist analyses of the nuclear family, both psychoanalytic and otherwise, exposed the underlying systems that seemingly ensured the continuance of the family form. They argued that the patriarchal structure of society was reflected in men's authority within the family, aided by both the separation of women from the sphere of economic production and the linking of feminine identity to the process of motherhood. They also argued that the nuclear family was one of the primary ways in which patriarchy reproduced itself through these same processes. While the weight of some of these arguments, particularly the totalising claims of some psychoanalytic thought, can represent the nuclear family as a monolithic structure that is the natural conclusion of a patriarchal culture, others expose the relative fragility of the form. It could be suggested that both approaches demonstrate the broadly mythological nature of the nuclear family ideal and its inability to survive, as the dominant form of family life, under such close scrutiny.

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The Limits of Discursive Dominance and the Possibility of 'Alternative' Families

The emergence of the middle-class nuclear family as the primary mythological ideal of family life, which broadly mirrored an accompanying process of industrialization, was both supported and undermined by the forms entry into discourses of medicine, politics and social reform. While the dominance of the nuclear family may have lead to the discursive repression of other family forms as 'improper', or even condemned them to silence, it simultaneously allowed for a

discussion of its own validity. As companionate marriage and ideals of masculinity and femininity as realised through the process of parenting usurped economic motivations for retaining the bonds of family the discursive power of the nuclear model became of greater importance. While what came to be termed the nuclear family form may have constituted a common, yet nameless, family form prior to this process, it could be argued that the discursive weight placed behind the concept in industrialized societies shifted the form from the realm of reality to the realm of myth. While the make-up of many families, particularly in the more economically comfortable strata of society to whom the myth spoke most explicitly, may have changed little in concrete terms the way in which these family forms were viewed and the rationale behind them would have changed dramatically. Roland Barthes (1999, p.57) suggests that “myth has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification and making contingency appear eternal”, while also suggesting a connection between this process and the economic situation in which it takes place by describing it as “exactly that of bourgeois ideology”. While many of the discourses of the nuclear family clearly match this description of the process of myth-making in their assumptions about the historical, biological and social precedents for the form, they also seem to offer a possibility of deconstruction. Barthes may well have argued for the nuclear family myth as a form of “*depoliticized speech* (sic)” in which the nuclear family form is actualised and spoken about but also naturalised and the process of its own fabrication denied. What the proliferation of critique that accompanied the increasing discursive dominance of the nuclear family potentially proves, however, is that the description and quantification of the form as myth also led, seemingly, to many analyses that did expose this fabrication. Even Freud’s work on the psychology of the family, despite its universalising impulses, shows a process

through which the gendered identities that ensure the reproduction of the heterosexual relationships at the core of the nuclear family form are reproduced. Feminist analyses of the nuclear family took this one step further, demonstrating the inequalities that underpinned it and the cultural and social assumptions that maintained these inequalities.

Not only does the kind of deconstruction of which Barthes was a pioneer have a legacy in the humanities and social sciences but it too has a precedent in the creation of new disciplines in the human sciences during the late 19th and early 20th century. That this process coincided with the rise of the nuclear family to become the dominant myth of the Western family is no coincidence. Nor is it a coincidence that this process coincided with the consolidation of industrialized, capitalist societies in the same region. As the sphere of economic production became separated from other aspects of experience an overarching ideology that could provide the sort of social cohesion necessary for an agricultural economy to function became unnecessary. As the ascent of capitalism continued the market became the prime arbiter of success, eroding the importance of other institutions of social organisation such as the church, the monarchy and even, arguably, the class system through which society had previously been organised. A corresponding trend towards liberal humanism associated with Enlightenment thinking in northwestern Europe also contributed to this shift away from these previously monolithic institutions.

Capitalist, industrialised society required new institutions around which to organise, however, and new myths began to emerge which better matched the needs and functions of a market economy. The nuclear family became one of these primary myths. The central logic of companionate marriage and the biological ‘naturalness’ of the parental roles proposed for men and women within this structure speak to a desire

for personal fulfilment rather than economic security. In this sense the nuclear family not only suited the economic needs of a capitalist economy, as the structural functionalist arguments of Talcott Parsons suggested, but also offered a rationale for the continuance of the family based on the realisation of self once the economic impetus for family life had, for some, been partially removed. While, as even a cursory analysis has shown, the nuclear family was actually not ideally placed to fulfil these ideals, particularly for women, the increased discursive coherence of the nuclear family myth offered a model that became so successfully naturalised that it came to represent the very concept of family in universalising theoretical frameworks such as Freud's.

But, unlike the premodern familial bonds based on economic necessity, the myth of the nuclear family implied a rationale of choice behind its creation. While the increasing discourse on the family may have suggested a greater coherence in the make-up of the Western family, and consolidated the dominance of the nuclear model in the discursive realm, it may also have been symptomatic of the threat that an industrialized economy posed to the bonds of necessity that had traditionally drawn people together into family units. The proliferation of discourse on the family could, therefore, be read as the attempt of Western society to convince its members of the validity of an institution that was, in reality, in danger of losing its previously privileged position as the central unit of societal organisation.

This reading then offers two pathways for further exploration. The first reads this new concern with the family as purely oppressive, and potentially *repressive*, interrupting what was a once a private relationship between members of the same kinship group and moulding them into the model deemed appropriate for the successful continuation of industrial society. The mythological success of the nuclear

family model may well support a reading such as this, suggesting that the fabrication of the myth itself has been denied and the form is presented as the truly ‘natural’ model of the Western family.

On the other hand, an alternative reading might suggest that the entry of the family into discourse created the possibility of openly discussing the forms that the family could, and did, take. While many of the classic theories of the family appear to offer a single permutation, by reifying the nuclear family model, many of them are in fact critiquing this model, even as an assumption of its naturalness underpins them. Freud may be the prime, and most influential, example of this tendency. While Freudian psychoanalysis assumes a ‘normal’ psychological development predicated on the relationships that form the core of the nuclear family, its focus on the way in which this development can be disrupted offers the possibility of alternative, albeit predominantly negative, processes arising out of the very same family set-up that it validates. It is not too much of a conceptual leap from this point, as demonstrated by the feminist critiques and developments of the Freudian model, to suggest that the nuclear family model, and the assumptions that surround it, could actually be a key contributing factor to the psychological maladies identified and confronted by Freud. Discourses that normalise the nuclear family, such as the discourse of Freudian psychoanalysis, could be read, on one level, as an attempt to persuade people to continue choosing a form of social institution that never used to rely on people’s active choice for its survival. On another level, however, they suggest a need to reinforce the concept through an application of discursive strength and thus demonstrate the new weakness of the concept, when compared to its previous position as an unspoken norm.

That the same social context in which the nuclear family was identified as being central to its maintenance also produced such a rise in the humanities and social sciences is no coincidence. Such discourses, rather than being read as value-free observations on the culture that surrounds them, must also be read as products of that same culture. The increasing dissemination of Enlightenment ideals of liberty and individualism that found their expression in the erosion of religious influence and the primacy of the marketplace in Western society, fostered an intellectual context in which the individuality of the human subject under discussion became increasingly central. Disciplines such as psychology, sociology, anthropology and linguistics, which progressed from new to relatively dominant members of the academy between the late 19th and mid 20th centuries, fore-grounded individual experience rather than the larger social processes and institutions analysed in theological, historical or political analysis. It was in this same intellectual climate that the ideal of the family moved away from a definition that mainly saw the institution as having a social function to one in which the family also had a personal function, that of self-fulfilment for the individual.

This new discourse on the family demonstrated an inversion of a ‘top-down’ analysis, in which the working structure of a society is attributed to those institutions which are at its head, such as the church or the monarchy, to a ‘bottom-up’ analysis which begins with the individuals who constitute the society and extrapolates its working structure from that point. Once this approach is fore-grounded, however, not only does a greater plurality need to be taken into account but personal motivation also needs to be discovered, or manufactured, for those processes to survive. As the problems faced by Freud’s patients, or the inequalities identified by feminist analysis, demonstrated, however, the nuclear family did not necessarily provide a level of

fulfilment for its members that could produce enough of this motivation to ensure its continued, unchecked dominance.

While the discursively pervasive nature of the nuclear family seems to imply a hegemonic position within the wider discourse on family life, the very discourse which did most to quantify the institution and produce this effect actually began the process of its dismantling. The myth of nuclear family and its own critique are born out of the same social context in which individual freedoms and choices are seen as the primary motivators behind social institutions. While Greer (1999, p.248) may or may not be correcting in suggesting that the nuclear family is “perhaps the shortest lived familial system in history”, in terms of her historical accuracy, the period of its dominance as the primary myth of family life in the history of Western civilisation could well be described in these terms. It is possible, even likely given the convincing arguments of historians such as Mary S Hartman, that what we think of today as the nuclear family existed prior to the type of industrial society that is often credited with its creation. As this form became named, quantified and investigated, however, it simultaneously denied plurality with its totalising impetus and opened up the possibility of alternative forms through an exploration of its own limitations. The effects of this discursive double function can be seen in the swift acceptance, both socially and culturally, of a plurality of family experiences that followed the enshrining of the nuclear family as a discursive ideal. The very system that supposedly produced the nuclear family also created the correct context for its deconstruction. The truth, of course, is that the mythologizing of the nuclear family was, itself, the first part of this process.

3: The Discourse of Fatherhood Within The Nuclear Family

When we take into account the challenges, both discursively and demographically, to the supremacy of the nuclear family outlined in the last chapter it leads us to inevitably question how and why the nuclear family remains such a dominant myth of family life in Western, industrialized societies. As we have seen, feminist analyses of the nuclear family, amongst others, have produced convincing arguments that outline certain inequalities underpinning the institution and suggesting its inability to provide the kind of emotional fulfilment (most obviously for women) that a system based on companionate marriage and a superior regard for the activity of mothering could arguably be expected to provide. Yet, as we also saw, the nuclear model insists on clinging stubbornly to its position as the dominant form of family life against which all others must be measured and judged. The question of how this disparity between critique of the nuclear family model and the relative mythological weight it is continually afforded can continue to exist leads us to question how and why the nuclear model has become so heavily enshrined that it seemingly cannot be dislodged from its dominant discursive position. If one half of the gendered binary at the heart of the nuclear family potentially suffer the negative effects of such an arrangement, are we to assume, as some feminist analysis does, that this system is put in place for the benefit of the other half? In other words, is the nuclear family an expression of patriarchy that benefits the husband/father at the expense of his partner?

While the biological functionalist argument for the dominance of the nuclear family may be both potentially simplistic and ignore the common presence of deviation from this norm we must surely accept some connection between the processes of family life and the formation of a broader gender order in Western

society. Similarly while we may quite reasonably argue that Freudian theory does not tell the whole story of how we as individuals formed our own gendered and sexual identities, his insistence on the centrality of the family as key catalyst in these processes seems to point to a wider truth about their importance in the creation of such an order in a male-dominated society. The very term, ‘patriarchy’, which “came into widespread use around 1970 to describe this system of gender domination” (Connell, 1995, p.41) and whose literal meaning is derived from the term ‘patriarch’ or “father and ruler” (Burgess, 1998, p.5), certainly implies some sort of primary relationship between the process of fathering and male dominance.

Adrienne Rich (1977, p.60) suggests that “the core of patriarchy is the individual family unit which originated with the idea of property and the desire to see one’s property transmitted to one’s biological descendants”. She goes on to argue that this transmission of property can only be satisfyingly achieved if the paternity of one’s biological descendants can be completely assured:

“A crucial moment in human consciousness then, arrives when man discovers that it is he himself, not the moon or the spring rains or the spirits of the dead, who impregnates the woman....At this crossroads of sexual possession, property ownership, and the desire to transcend death, developed the institution we know: the present day patriarchal family.” (Rich, 1977, p.60)

Some theorists have suggested that prior to this discovery of the male’s role in sexual reproduction most societies would have been organised on matrilineal lines although, as Rich points out, it is important not to confuse matrilineal with matriarchal, the transmission of kinship ties through the mother’s line not necessarily implying female dominance. What this argument does imply, however, is the central function that knowledge of the reproductive role, both literally and figuratively, has in the creation of a patriarchal society.

The Legacy of the Caveman: Biological Arguments for Patriarchy

The very use of the term 'patriarchy' places this reproductive role at the centre of the process of the creation of our gender order, extrapolating the different biological processes of mothering and fathering into fundamental motivations behind the inequalities of a patriarchal society. While the prehistory of the nuclear model is probably more complex in reality, a nonetheless common narrative of the rise of patriarchy as a system suggests that it was preceded by a system that was broadly matriarchal until the male procreative role became explicit. Just as the biological functionalism of Talcott Parsons suggested that the four main functions of the family are the reproduction, maintenance, social placement and socialization of the young, theories of patriarchy also seem to suggest that the primary motivation behind the different ways in which male and female roles are organized in society are fundamentally based on the need for a heterosexual coupling to take place if society is to reproduce itself. If we do admit the biological need for this coupling to take place, at least until very recently, in order for reproduction to occur, we cede little more to the argument for the naturalness of a patriarchal system in human society, however, than we do for the argument that the male should be similarly dominant in all other species that require two sexes to reproduce. In fact, placing the biological processes of reproduction at the centre of the creation of our contemporary gender order could easily suggest quite the opposite. As Rich's conception of the matrilineal society that precedes it suggests, patriarchy arguably inverts the more visible connection between females and reproduction, to which the processes of pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding all contribute, in favour of the largely unseen masculine role.

It is the 'unseen' nature of the masculine role in the reproductive process that offers a potential starting point for discussion of the role of the father within the

nuclear model specifically. Theoretical accounts of the processes of fathering and mothering separate radically immediately after the sexual act. Once the male has fulfilled his role in the coupling there is no strict biological imperative for him to take any further role in the reproductive process. As Rich's argument suggests, prior to the knowledge that the sexual act was in any way linked to reproduction of the species this male role may not have even been considered to be part of the process. It may even be stretching a point to refer to this act as 'fathering' in the sense that we use the word today, yet we still refer to the sexual act as the most basic way in which a man can 'father' a child. 'Mothering', on the other hand, inevitably extends beyond the act of procreation through the processes of pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding. At the most basic biological level a man can 'father' a child in a single moment but the act of 'mothering' a child extends over a period of at least nine months.

This basic disparity has often been proposed as the genesis of contemporary gender inequalities, as well as the genesis of our contemporary notions of parenting. After all, while women may be biologically fore-grounded in the process of reproduction they are also burdened by the physical processes involved. The physical demands of pregnancy and childbirth require a withdrawal, at least to some extent, from certain other processes that are necessary for survival. In hunter-gatherer societies the acquisition of food, for example, would have become harder when pregnant and would have been subsequently compounded by the difficulty of having extra mouths to feed once the pregnancy is over. The solution to this problem for early human societies seems to have been to socialise the process to create a division of labour between those members of a society biologically tasked with the birthing of infants and other members who can provide support throughout this process. What is proposed in many of the theories of early matriarchal society, of which Rich's

detailed account of the work of Robert Briffault is one example, is that the female reproductive role actually gave them an advantage in social terms, but this role did not necessarily extend to dominance over the male:

“Briffault’s matriarchal society is one in which female creative power is pervasive, and women have organic authority, rather than one in which the woman establishes and maintains domination and control over the man, as the man over the woman in patriarchy. There would be, according to Briffault, a kind of free consent to the authority of woman in a matriarchal society, because of her involvement with the essential practical and magical activity of that society. He thus sees matriarchy as organic by nature”. (Rich, 1977, p.60)

While this argument may seem logical it is important to join both Rich and Briffault in drawing a distinction between the kind of ‘authority’ enjoyed by women in this type of matriarchal society and the kind of authority enjoyed by men in a patriarchal society, as we understand it today. Once again, the essential difference between the visible and invisible aspects of male and female parenting shape the way in which authority is wielded by either sex.

Simone De Beauvoir also discusses some of the more common arguments surrounding the division of labour within pre-agricultural societies in some detail. She parts company with Briffault, however, in maintaining a much more pessimistic account of the relative authority afforded women due to their reproductive capabilities. In fact, as she starkly reminds us, “This has always been a man’s world” (1988, p.93). She then goes on to suggest that the female ability to produce children, far from allowing them any meaningful kind of power, is, in fact, the primary reason that women’s social importance was limited in comparison with that of the male:

“As there was obviously no birth control, and as nature failed to provide women with sterile periods like other mammalian females, closely spaced maternities must have absorbed most of their strength and their time, so that they were incapable of providing for the children they brought into the world.....Necessary as she was for the perpetuation of the species, she perpetuated it too generously, and so it was man who had to ensure equilibrium between reproduction and production.” (1988, p.94)

De Beauvoir's argument does not, of course, preclude the possibility that motherhood gave women a degree of mystical power within the group. She does, however, offer a persuasive argument against overextending this view to include the assumption that women became somehow socially dominant because of it, suggesting that:

“Even in times when humanity most needed births, when maternity was most venerated, manual labour was the primary necessity, and woman were never permitted to take first place. The primitive hordes had no permanence in property or territory, and hence no store set by posterity; children were for them a burden, not a prized possession.” (1988, p.94)

While there is a necessary level of conjecture throughout De Beauvoir's historical analysis she does usefully complicate one narrative of the growth of the family by suggesting that rather than usurping power from the visibly generative female, male dominance actually preceded knowledge of their reproductive role. In De Beauvoir's model men presumably would have had to accept some of the “burden” of providing for children not solely through concern for the continuation of their own bloodline.

While De Beauvoir's conception of the power relations of early human society requires a less radical break from the patriarchal model than does the “organic authority” of the female posited by Briffault it still leaves us with a key question: what motivated men to accept their part of the “burden” of provision for children prior to the knowledge of their own reproductive role? While Rich argues that patriarchy extends from this knowledge through a desire to protect and possess an investment in the posterity of the male's bloodline, De Beauvoir's argument seems to hinge on the somewhat depressing assertion that the primary motivation is an innate human desire to dominate suggesting, “when two human categories are together, each aspires to impose its sovereignty on the other” (1988, p.93). To De Beauvoir then, masculine domination, including by extension the seemingly necessary burden of provision for mother and child, extends from this innate drive to dominate coupled

with the physical ability to do so. Domination, rather than posterity, is, in itself, the reward for adopting the burden of provision.

Displaying the continuing relevance of these anthropologically based, philosophical arguments surrounding the creation of Western, patriarchal culture, the hugely popular and influential anthropology of Margaret Mead also questions the connection between the knowledge of paternity and nurturing activities of males. She takes great pains to argue, however, that this is not due to innate biological factors:

“Somewhere at the dawn of human history, some social invention was made under which males started nurturing females and their young. We have no reason to believe that the nurturing males had any knowledge of physical paternity, although it is quite possible that being fed was a reward meted out to the female who was not too fickle with her sexual favours.” (Mead, 1976, p.182)

While the possibility that Mead raises of food being more readily available for those women who were “not too fickle with their sexual favours” does have a certain logic to it, as she is the most likely to have borne the male’s child, on the other hand it also raises the possibility that ensuring paternity was certainly not a prerequisite for the provision of food. After all, the “female who is not too fickle with her sexual favours” will also be the most likely to be carrying the baby of one of the other males within the tribe. Mead also questions the universality of the importance of paternity but reasserts the importance of male nurturing through the then contemporary examples she explores in her anthropological work:

“Which women and which children are provided for is entirely a matter of social arrangements, although the central pattern seems to be that of a man’s providing for a woman who is his sexual partner and whatever children she may happen to have. Whether the children are believed to be his, or merely the children of a man of the same clan, or simply the legitimate children of his wife by some earlier marriage, may be quite irrelevant....The home shared by a man or men and female partners, into which men bring the food and women prepare it, is the basic common picture the world over. But this picture can be modified, and the modifications provide proof that the pattern itself is not something deeply biological.” (Mead, 1976, p.183)

Mead's assertion that their biological paternity may not be an important factor in whether or not a male decides to take responsibility for a child would seem to support De Beauvoir's argument that the male gains possession of these dependents through a drive to dominate, rather than a desire to ensure their own posterity. She places a more positive spin on these conclusions, however, by concentrating her analysis on the concept of "male nurturing" rather than the concept of male domination.

Whether the ascent of patriarchy is a result of, or pre-exists, knowledge of the male reproductive role, both sides of the argument are based on the fundamental premise that, as Mead states quite baldly in the title of her chapter, "Human Fatherhood is a Social Invention" (1976, p.177). All make the same basic, unavoidable distinction between the process of mothering as a biological necessity and fathering as socialised process. Effectively the process of mothering takes place regardless of the father's input whereas fathering only takes place as part of a wider social scenario. Despite its constructed nature, it is important to reassert that none of these theories attempt to downplay the importance of fathering. On the contrary, as we have seen, most of them posit the activity as one of the key motivations behind the existence of a patriarchal society. Nevertheless, the fact remains that fatherhood is arguably an optional extra in the struggle to perpetuate the species and, as an optional extra, systems need to be put in place to encourage males to adopt the role. A basic biological drive for sex only takes us so far, although, as De Beauvoir astutely identified, humans are capable of breeding all year round so the potentially constant desire for sex may have driven males to seek out more involved relationships with females in order to ensure an uninterrupted supply. If sex were the only motivation, however, it would seem perfectly possible for males to choose to select to live outside

of a family grouping and still gain access to it. Yet, as Mead identifies, this is a rare scenario across most cultures:

“In every known society, everywhere in the world, the young male learns that when he grows up, one of the things he must do in order to be a full member of society is to provide food for some female and her young...every known human society rest firmly on the learned nurturing behaviour of men.” (1976, p.182)

The key term in this paragraph, of course, is “learned”.

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An Acquired Skill: Fatherhood As Manufactured Process

Mead’s work exemplifies the main idea that underpins almost all contemporary discourses on fatherhood: it is the result of processes of socialisation rather than an innate biological function, which, until relatively recent feminist challenges to this concept, is generally how motherhood has been conceived. Whether these discourses attempt to reify motherhood (both the biological aspects of procreation and aspects of nurturing that are almost always conflated into the myth of a coherent whole) or view it as the ultimate way in which women can become imprisoned by their own physicality, there is a sense of motherhood as something innate to the experience of womanhood. Adrienne Rich’s book is itself an attempt to address this by drawing a distinction between motherhood as “experience” and as “institution”. When it comes to fatherhood, on the other hand, the discursive focus shifts dramatically onto the institutional aspect and very rarely seeks to deal with the experience. While the relative dominance that the binary parental roles afford each gender, either in historical or contemporary scenarios, form the basis of an absolutely necessary debate, it is clear that these arguments start from very different points. The discursive narrative of motherhood, particularly in feminist thought, is that of a

biological imperative that leads to a subsequent loss of real power, despite its apparent coherence as a concept. The discursive narrative of fatherhood, alternatively, reverses this process to suggest a situation in which a social imperative is created to consolidate power. But it is an imperative that must be constantly reinforced through social institutions because it lacks the sense of biological inevitability fostered by the more visible processes of mothering.

One such institution, which we have already mentioned briefly, and is commonly commented upon as providing one of the key justifications for patriarchy, is that of religion. Extending the analysis of patriarchy as arising from the inherent gendered divisions in human reproduction, some have theorised that monotheistic, patriarchal religions arose out of a male need to consolidate their fragile control over the reproductive process and usurp the sense of mysticism with which it traditionally endowed women, as expressed in the various Mother-Goddess figures that many believe predate the rise of monotheist, patriarchal religion. In this sense, analysis of patriarchal religions demonstrates the way in which a virtue is made of the relative invisibility of the father's role in the procreative act. It seems entirely possible that, while the visibility of the female reproductive role may have originally inspired a sense of mysticism that lent itself to worship of a female deity or deities, once the male role in reproduction had been discovered it was relatively easy to inspire a greater sense of inherent mysticism precisely because of its unseen nature.

God the Father creates a central model of generation as a masculine activity that percolates down through the other institutions that structure a patriarchal society. Certainly, many of the 'traditional values' that have helped to sculpt Western society's traditional family set-up into the shape of the nuclear model are validated

through the monotheistic dogma of Christianity. Adrienne Burgess emphasises the importance of the church in the construction of the Western family thusly:

“Images of fatherhood are not only provided by myth and fairytale, but by our social and economic systems which, for a long while, were essentially Christianity’s ‘political wing’”. (1998, p.10)

This focus on paternity fostered a system in which male authority was justified through an appeal to the paternal authority of God.

Burgess’ account of the relative cultural importance of motherhood and fatherhood may seem surprising when contrasted with the reification of the process of mothering which permeates our contemporary discourses on parenting. The reason for this may be that challenges to patriarchy have placed our cultural notion of the father in a rather contradictory position. Challenges such as feminism have meant that, while we accept the fact that men are the dominant sex in our society (in almost every society, in fact) the justifications for this situation are now open to serious and sustained critique. The figure of the father cannot help but embody a great deal of this contradiction. Historically, however, the role of father has not been viewed as particularly contradictory:

“...the most striking fact to be gleaned from the study of fathers and fatherhood is the centrality of the image of the authoritarian father to moral and political debate in the West over many centuries. Until recently it was paternal authority rather than maternal instinct which was deemed to be a natural fact, and fathers, not mothers, of whom great things were expected. In the 18th century the father was so much the dominant parental figure that the words parent and father were used interchangeably.” (Burgess, 1998, p.2)

Just as the word ‘mother’ enjoys the status of a verb in our current parlance, the word ‘father’ used to stand for a more coherent set of behaviours and attitudes towards parenting rather than the relatively problematic label it has become. Equally, while today the vast majority of custody battles see custody granted to the mother, in previous centuries this situation would also have been reversed.

Once again we can see how the specific contexts in which our contemporary discourse on the family has been shaped effects the relative discursive power of both motherhood and fatherhood. As we discovered previously, much of the work that forms the basis of this contemporary discourse was generated in an historical context that prioritises the nuclear model over other family forms. While the narrative of the rise of the patriarch, including the usurpation of the privileged feminine connection with procreation through such systems as patriarchal religion, provides one possible account of the rise of patriarchy as a system it only partially takes into account the relative absence of discussion of the more literal aspects of fathering from this discourse. It is a discursive absence that has become, rather ironically, a well-worn refrain in much of the literature that does attempt to deal with the experience of fatherhood. Much of the discourse of the 'family in crisis' foregrounds this aspect of our contemporary view of fatherhood, of course, but more worryingly a trend towards ignoring the experiences of fatherhood can even be identified in the burgeoning literature that focuses on masculinity. Deborah Lupton and Lesley Barclay are amongst the growing number who have identified this tendency:

"In its neglect of fatherhood, this literature, particularly as written by men, tends to reproduce a limited notion of the problematic of masculinities. Masculinities, this absence implies revolve around bodily power and action, physical strength and engagement in education and paid labour. As such, much academic writing on masculinities tends to support the notion that men's lives and senses of self are centrally located in the 'public' sphere rather than the 'domestic' or 'private' sphere....It is difficult to imagine a book addressing femininities with such limited references to the role and experience of motherhood." (1997, p.4)

A comparison between this discursive absence and the prioritisation of fatherhood in earlier discourses on parenting, as identified in the work of Adrienne Burgess, suggests that the change in relative discursive weight afforded motherhood and

fatherhood broadly coincides with the rise in discursive dominance of the nuclear family.

Yet the anthropologically-based arguments of De Beauvoir and Rich, amongst others, suggest that the usurpation of the mystical power of procreation by men is one of, if not *the*, key factor in the creation of patriarchy which finds its expression in the nuclear family set-up. These accounts attempt to find prior models, and anthropological explanations, for a family model that very much resembles the nuclear. If the creation of a nuclear family model is partially an expression of patriarchy, as implied by the suggestion that the male part in the act of procreation leads to a scenario in which women and children become commodified and exchanged amongst men, how do we account for their discursive absence at best, and negative presence at worst, in much of our contemporary discourse on the family? How does a system that, it has been argued, contributes to the power of men lead to a situation in which the father, previously a key figure in the maintenance of masculine power as expressed through the use of the term 'patriarchy', has become so discursively weak? Could it be that the same irony identified in the discursive reification of the nuclear model at precisely the point that it became arguably untenable can also be extended to our dominant models of fatherhood within the same discourse?

The value-laden discourse of the family 'in crisis' would certainly suggest that fathers are the metaphorical canary in the mineshaft when it comes to the cultural dismantling of the nuclear family. David Blankenhorn, for one, draws a comparison between the literal absence of a father figure in many families with the absence of fathers from discourse on the family:

“Unlike earlier periods of father absence in our history, we now face more than a physical loss affecting some homes. We face a cultural loss affecting every home. For this reason, the most important absence is not the absence of fathers but the absence in our belief in fathers. (1995, p.3)

While we may not all share the same politics when it comes to assessing the relative values expressed in changes in the make-up of the family, it is not difficult to agree intellectually with this broader argument. Just as the nuclear family became enshrined as a concept at the same time as people began to push against the constraints it placed on its members, it is possible that discourse of fatherhood within this broader model have been subject to a similar process.

To understand how fatherhood could have become the canary in the mineshaft for the nuclear family we must turn our attention to the second of the two key aspects in most notions of fatherhood, which is arguably more central to our contemporary discourse. While we have seen that arguments can, and have, been made for the procreative abilities of men forming the basis of their domination of women, as exemplified in the creation of patriarchal, monotheistic religions deifying the image of a singular father, we must also remember that creation is not God’s only function. God is also a provider and it is this role that has, arguably, had more effect on our contemporary notions of fatherhood within the nuclear family model than the former. We have already discussed the way in which the separation of the domestic sphere from the sphere of economic production has potentially effected our discursive notions of the purpose of family, shifting it, in Beck-Gernsheim’s (1998) succinct phraseology, from a “community of need” to one of “elective affinities”. While this shift may have had, and continue to have, extensive effects on our notion of the family it would be fair to say that the effects of this discursive, and literal, separation may have had even more extensive effects on our conceptions of gender as whole, both within the family context and without. The separation of economic production

from the domestic sphere is certainly at the very heart of the relative absence of masculinity from family discourse.

As outlined in the previous chapter, there is strong historical evidence to suggest that the nuclear family model has long been a common family form in Northwestern Europe and is commonly associated with the rise of an industrial economy in that region. As to whether the nuclear model came about as a response to, or was a primary cause, of an industrialised, capitalist economy was a matter that has been left open to debate. What is less debateable, however, is the highly privileged position that this model held within discourses on the family in the region. We also saw that critique of the lack of historical specificity in much of this discourse was necessary if we were to understand the contradiction inherent in a comparison between the discursive dominance of the model and the varied demographic realities of family life. By identifying the work of Freud and psychoanalytic theory, as well as feminism, as key discourses in which the nuclear family was simultaneously enshrined and critiqued, it became possible to identify the way in which the increase in discourse on the family both reflected, as well as instigated, changes in the dominant model. It also became possible to discern, in necessarily broad terms, a historical juncture at which this process began and this juncture's relationship to the processes of industrialisation that have been seen as central to both the creation of the nuclear family by some theorists and its destruction by others. It is possible to identify similar tensions in discourses on fatherhood.

As one may expect from a historian, John Tosh offers a historically situated view of the moment at which the discursive position of men within the family changed by focusing his research on the Victorian era. He argues that, at this point in

history, domestic life was still central to the British conception of masculinity, going as far as to suggest that:

“Never before or since has domesticity been held to be so central to masculinity. For most of the 19th century home was widely held to be a man’s place, not only in the sense of being his possession or fiefdom, but also as a place where his deepest needs were met. Questions to do with domestic affections and domestic authority permeated the advice books read by men, as they did the novels of Charles Dickens. In an age when, in the estimation of the Victorians, economic and social advance reached unprecedented levels, the men credited with these achievements were expected to be dutiful husbands and attentive fathers, devotees of hearth and family. The Victorians articulated an ideal of home against which men’s conduct has been judged ever since.” (Tosh, 1999, p.1)

At first glance, Tosh’s argument that domesticity was central to a conception of British masculinity as recently as the Victorian era seems impossible to reconcile with the trend in contemporary discourse on masculinity to focus their attention almost anywhere else. As we read on, however, a picture forms of a period in history in which this conception began to change and the tensions inherent in the discursive attempts to reinforce the domestic aspects of masculinity in the face of the growing physical absence of the father from that very sphere became strikingly obvious.

At the heart of this contradiction lies the increased separation of the ‘public’ and ‘private’ spheres and their consequent gendered natures. There can be little doubt that Tosh’s focus on the Victorian era suggests the importance of industrialisation to this process. While he is rightly loath to simplify this process to the point at which the explosion in factory production is solely responsible for the separation of *all* professional activity from the home he does share the common conviction that the working processes of industrialised capitalism increased the atomisation of individual families from their community:

“The trend in favour of a separation of home and work was driven less by the factory than by the pace of economic growth in towns generally. As more and more businesses were concentrated in the urban centres, noise, smell and other forms of pollution increased. The heart of a manufacturing town became less attractive as a place to live.” (Tosh, 1999, p.16)

Unlike the arguments that posit the creation of the nuclear family as the ideal form to benefit this process of industrialisation, Tosh seems to support the more historically situated perspective of Mary S. Hartman. The picture that he paints is of the process of industrialisation creating irreversible and fundamental shifts in the way in which a previously common family set-up, which could easily be termed nuclear, related to a broader social context due to changes in the location in which key gendered subjectivities were formed. Tosh’s specific argument, as it relates to the importance of domesticity to conceptions of masculinity in that era, provides further support for the thesis that, far from being the ideal form of family life to ensure the smooth running of an industrialised society, what we consider the nuclear family set-up today is actually more in danger of being eroded rather than maintained by these processes. In fact, in the narrative he outlines of the changes that took place in discourses on fatherhood during the Victorian era, he potentially offers a study of a test case of the way in which discursive dominance could well be obtained just prior to discursive deconstruction.

Tosh offers up numerous textual examples which support his argument that domesticity was central to the Victorian conception of masculinity, yet he also offers an intriguing analysis of the way in which the difficulties that Victorian fathers had living up to this conception in turn fed back into, and consequently changed, the discourse itself:

“Beneath the surface Victorian fatherhood held a decidedly ambiguous position in the culture and practice of Victorian family life. In fact its location in the private sphere was the nub of the problem. For if public and private were really separate spheres defined by gender, then parenting must fall exclusively to the women’s lot. If, on the other hand the virtues of domesticity had a claim on both sexes, fatherhood became a telling touchstone of men’s commitment to the home. Since both these views coexisted in the Victorian middle class, there was a great deal of uncertainty about what was expected of father.” (Tosh, 1999, p.79)

Almost all the of the discourses on fatherhood that we have examined so far have placed the act of provision somewhere near the top of the key activities that define the core activities of fathering. In Tosh’s argument we see interesting echoes of some of the arguments suggested by the anthropological focus of De Beauvoir, Rich and Mead.

There appears to be a cycle, suggested through all of these theories, structuring cultural discourses on fatherhood and based on the relative weight afforded the twin activities of procreation and provision. During the prehistory hypothesised by the feminist analyses of De Beauvoir, men undertook a large part of the burden of provision due to the women’s biological advantage in the act of procreation. The more involved biological processes of procreation for women meant that the generative aspects of femininity were revered and motherhood was very often deified, although it is almost impossible to overstress the way in which this scenario did not necessarily guarantee women any real, social power within the group. While their femininity may be venerated, it was done so precisely because of the act of procreation, which, in turn, prevented them from taking a fully active role in the provision activities of the tribe. The usurpation of this feminine deity or deities by a monotheistic religion that privileged a masculine god seems to follow an increased process of acculturation on the part of the human race. While it is largely unnecessary at this juncture to critique the inevitable argument which suggests an increase in male

dominance as solely responsible for this arc of 'progress', not least because of the distinction between the ways in which the deification of the masculine and feminine led to different enactments of power, this narrative of the development of the family does seem to suggest that many human societies went through a long period during which fatherhood was privileged and male dominance assured. This seems to coincide with the rise of a more agrarian society in which activities of procreation and provision would have been, more often than not, enacted within the same sphere. As Hartman suggests, this form of family life may actually have encouraged a nuclear family set-up to a higher degree than the industrialised societies that followed.

Tosh's suggestion that this process of industrialisation once again separated out the processes of procreation and provision into separate spheres seems to be accompanied, to some extent, by a cyclical return to these prehistorical models of masculinity and femininity. While Tosh makes it clear that Victorian masculinity was very much enacted within the domestic sphere, he also seems to suggest that the period was something of a crisis point for this conception of domestic masculinity with a corresponding increase in the discursive power of the feminine in the domestic context:

"From the late eighteenth century...scientific enquiry began to place more emphasis on conception as a natural process which unfolded within the woman's body, with the ovum rather than the seminal fluid holding the key to the mystery of generation. Childbirth came to be seen as the fulfilment of a woman's femininity rather than a disruption to her performance of the duties of a wife. This was one reason why the prestige of motherhood was on the increase, and it meant that the mother as the bearer of the child became the central figure, rather than the father as the bearer of the family name. Instead of being the master of ceremonies and the focus of public attention, the father was on the way to becoming the nervous bystander of recent times". (Tosh, 1999, p.81)

Tosh certainly sees this as something of a crisis point in the conception of a domestic masculinity, as he makes explicit in the title of the section in which he discusses this shift: “The Climax of Domesticity”.

It is interesting to note the parallels in Tosh’s argument and the theories discussed previously. In both, the removal of masculinity from the domestic sphere, brought about by a division of labour based, at least in part, on the different biological roles of men and women in the procreative process, is accompanied by an increased discursive regard for the act of mothering. Both narratives seem to suggest that change in the discourse on parenting, and inevitably the wider discourse on gender, primarily occurs as the societal expression of the core divisions of labour at the heart of the reproductive process ebb and flow. The traditional narrative of the usurpation of the mystical feminine in the work of Adrienne Rich, amongst others, suggests that the shift from a hunter-gatherer society to an agrarian society would constitute one of these moments. In the hunter-gatherer society men would have, arguably, been somewhat removed from the process of parenting, due to a necessity to provide for the female and her offspring, for whom, as so astutely observed by De Beauvoir, nature had provided no fallow periods. While we have already seen that it has been suggested patriarchy may have been bolstered by the male co-opting a reproductive process he had not been explicitly connected to previously, a more nuanced argument might suggest that this change in the relative cultural weight behind the concept of fatherhood may well have been a result of the more fundamental societal changes in the transition from a pre-agrarian to an agrarian society. In fact, the division of labour at the heart of our common notions of fatherhood and motherhood, and by extension our broader notions of gender, would have been arguably less prominent in an agrarian society where economic production was more integrated with domestic life.

The lengthy processes of modernity gradually separated out these two realms once again, absenting the male from the domestic sphere and creating a shift in the accompanying discourse. The changes in the way that the Victorian father was conceived, as identified by Tosh, may well demonstrate this process in action.

In the realm of discourse, if not in the realm of reality where a greater degree of plurality may well be observable, we can identify a cyclical narrative of a conception of fatherhood that offers up two broad versions of a myth of patriarchy. The primary myth, with which we begun this chapter and that appears to return in Tosh's analysis of the Victorian era, is an image of fatherhood based on absence from the domestic realm. The second narrative is of a form of fatherhood intimately associated with the domestic realm to a point at which the concept of fatherhood and the concept of parenting more generally become almost inseparable. Each is based on a gendered division of labour within differing contexts and, interestingly, each seems to ensure the dominance of the male within society more generally. Of course, this power is enacted in different ways in each context. While in the first model the father may be absent from the domestic realm he also intrinsically claims the public realm for himself. Thus any power that women and infants possess is almost completely confined to the domestic sphere and its limitations are extremely clear.

The second model retains male power through its discursive strength, on the other hand, providing justifications for male dominance within the domestic sphere as much as in any other aspect of society. Conceptions of a masculinity into which domesticity can be fully integrated would have been necessary to ensure that this dominance remained assured and this could well account for the almost unquestioned dominance of the father within the discourse on the family right up until the late Victorian period. Equally, the rigid boundaries that separate women from the world of

work would not have been in place in this discursive context and the economic provision of the family would have been the responsibility of all.

Throughout the theories we have discussed so far it would appear the ‘progress’ of agrarian society had encouraged this more integrated arrangement for large swathes of human history. Thus, we can find the sort of evidence that Tosh and Burgess both uncover that proves the historical integration of masculinity and domesticity. Equally, we can find evidence, in many historical periods and social contexts, suggesting women played a greater part in the affairs of public life than is accounted for in contemporary discourses on the different spheres inhabited by the two genders.

It is this gendering of the spheres of domesticity and public life that proves central to our contemporary discourse on the family. The primary justification for the current absence of fathers from discourse on the family appears to be the father’s absence from the domestic sphere due to the increasing separation of home and work life inherent in the process of industrialisation. But we also find an echo of this set-up in the human prehistory posited by the work of De Beauvoir and others. How do we explain, then, this cycle of radically differing conceptions of domestic masculinity?

The key factor is the impact that the moment at which these discourses were formed has had on the theories and ideas that they posit. As we saw in the first chapter, the contemporary discourse on the family is dominated by the nuclear model despite a higher level of diversity in the lived experience of family life. This was due to the context in which key studies that set many of the parameters for the study of the family, particularly in the burgeoning fields that made up the humanities, were produced. We also identified the irony of many of these studies enshrining a coherent myth of the nuclear family at precisely the point when the form potentially became

most untenable. We can observe the same tendency in the discourses on fatherhood under discussion. De Beauvoir, like Freud, works backwards from the contemporary context that she observes to find historical and biological justifications for that context. With this in mind her conception of the division of labour in human prehistory offers a primary cause for the gendered division of labour in the industrialised context in which she writes. Once again, as with our discussion of the broader nuclear family myth, we can identify the entry of the concept into discourse as the beginning of a dual process of quantification and deconstruction. While De Beauvoir's historical analysis offers a biological underpinning for the assertion of patriarchy, her conception of how a contemporary gender order was created actually allows for critique of the model. Unlike Freud of course, whose tendencies towards universalising his concepts has often heavily disguised their deconstructive potential, it is clearly De Beauvoir's intention in her work to use her historical analysis to question the inevitability of the system of patriarchy which it may at first suggest.

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Fatherhood in the Symbolic Realm

As we found with our analysis of the discursive power of the nuclear family model within a broader discourse on the family, outside of analyses which place the gendered nature of the institution at the core of their discussion, such as feminism, it can be hard to escape the equally dominant discourses on fatherhood that base their analysis on that particular model. Unlike the work of Tosh and Hartman, which offer us historically situated readings of family life which question some of the easy assumptions that have been made about the way in which family life has been lived throughout history, many of our key ideas about fatherhood extend from work done

on the nuclear family. In psychoanalysis, for example, where the nuclear model is dominant, key theories about the role of the father are based on the division of labour found at the heart of most definitions of this model.

We have already seen how Freud's Oedipus complex foregrounds father absence in the process of developing heterosexual attachment and assumes that the role of the primary caregiver is almost exclusively feminine. Yet John Tosh's analysis of the discourse of Victorian fatherhood posits a more integrated, if somewhat problematic, model of domestic masculinity that would seem to suggest two broadly opposing definitions existing within almost the same discursive moment. Once again, we see the potential for a discursive model to reach a position of dominance just prior to its deconstruction, with visible concern about the place of the Victorian father giving way to the assumption of a general absence from the domestic sphere by the beginning of the 20th century, as the process of industrialization continued to shift the central activity of economic provision out of the domestic realm.

Yet this process is complicated by the fact that, as Freud's strong focus on the family demonstrates, an assumed absence from the domestic sphere does not, in this case, equal a complete absence from the discourse of the family, merely an integration into the changing discourse of the family *as* an absence. The long periods of relative stability that characterised the pre-histories of the family posited by De Beauvoir and Rich, with the transition from tribal to agrarian society shifting a patriarchal power based on the unseen mysticism of the male generative role and provision through hunting to a more integrated notion of masculinity within the domestic sphere, are not simply mirrored by a return to an uncomplicated notion of patriarchal dominance through absence from the domestic sphere. Instead we observe a situation in which the absence of the father from the domestic sphere and the impact

this has on the maintenance of patriarchal power becomes integrated into a continuing discourse on the family, offering a way in which this power structure can be critiqued and, inevitably, instigating change within the discourse, and potentially the lived experience, of the family through a process of observation.

In Freud's analysis of the family a specific balance of literal paternal absence and symbolic presence has long been central to ensuring and maintaining patriarchal power. In *Totem and Taboo*, he joins De Beauvoir in looking to a potentially factually troublesome pre-history of human society to divine the origins of the psychological processes that also take place within the nuclear family. Taking the Oedipus Complex as a starting point he suggests that the sons of what he calls the "primal horde" murdered and ate their father because he stood in the way of their sexual desire for their mother and for power within the tribe:

"After they had satisfied their hate by his removal and had carried out their wish for identification with him, the suppressed tender impulses had to assert themselves. This took place in the form of remorse, a sense of guilt was formed which coincided here with the remorse generally felt. The dead now became stronger than the living had been, even as we observe it today in the destinies of men. What the fathers' presence had formerly prevented they themselves now prohibited in the psychic situation of 'subsequent obedience' which we know so well from psychoanalysis. They undid their deed by declaring the killing of the father substitute, the totem, was not allowed, and renounced the fruits of their deed by denying themselves the liberated women." (Freud, 1919, p.238).

It might be hard to swallow the idea of Freud's analysis of the usurpation of the father, and the creation of a new sort of patriarchal power based on imbuing a representative totem with the sons' ambivalent feelings towards the actual father, as the literal truth of the way in which patriarchal power functions. As Colin Davis' interesting analysis of this idea of father sacrifice suggests, in the realm of discourse it does not necessarily matter:

“...even if the murder is only a fantasy, the causal chain leading from murder to civilized religion and morality is unbroken; fantasises are as real and true as historical facts, perhaps even more so....Even if it never happened in anything like the way described by Freud, the murder of the primal father loses none of its power to explain the neurotic malaise of modern civilizations.” (Davis, 2000, p.195)

In essence, while we may resist the notion that Freud’s conception of the murder of the primal father is capable of explaining a literal history, or indeed, a literal desire for re-enactment within our own lives, his analysis may point us in the right direction for understanding our contemporary ambivalence about the symbolic figure of the patriarch.

Freud’s conception of the increasing power of the father in death rather than in life, in particular, reveals a core truth at the centre of contemporary discourse of fatherhood; that a distinction should be, but often is not, drawn between the symbolic function of the father/patriarch and the literal, biological practices of fathering. Primarily dealing, as it does, with unconscious processes, it is the symbolic function that is explored in the field of psychoanalysis. Once again, we must address the specific context in which this discourse developed to understand how this came to be.

The power of the primal father proves to be at the centre of almost all of the founding psychoanalytic theories of the role of the father, as it is in Freud’s conception of the deceased father’s totemistic representation of external law, most obviously expressed through the figure of a monotheistic, masculine God. Equally, Jacques Lacan’s engagement with Freudian theory still retains a focus on the symbolic elements of fatherhood, through the concept of the ‘paternal function’ as provided by the ‘symbolic father’, a point of separation from the mother not necessarily exclusively offered by the child’s biological father, a masculine, or even necessarily a literal, human figure. Lacan’s theories have arguably proven even more fruitful for feminist analysis than Freud’s, by attempting to establish more firmly this

distinction between the symbolic nature of the phallus and the literal figure of the father. Once again, however, Lacan's development of Freudian ideas about the role of the father is fundamentally based on absence rather than presence. While his work may address the symbolic realm, the fact remains that, by labelling the function that instigates separation from the mother, thus fostering an awareness of difference that institutes the creation of a coherent, individual identity in relation to an external Other, as 'paternal', Lacan relies on an existing discourse surrounding the role of the father to communicate his ideas. As one who explored the discursive limits of language, we can be sure that Lacan would have been the first to acknowledge the difficulty of relying on such heavily gendered language to outline a function that does not necessarily need to be performed by one particular gender. His retention of such heavily gendered labels, therefore, engages with, comments on, and ultimately intervenes in a pre-existing discourse on fatherhood.

In Deborah Luepnitz's analysis of the uses of the use of his work in feminist theory she collates several of his responses to the charge of phallocentrism that has often been levelled at Lacan:

"A frequently asked question is: if Lacan wants us not to confuse the penis with the phallus, then why didn't he call the phallus something less penile – perhaps the 'all' or the 'omega'? Lacan, aiming to present his theory as a rereading of Freud, cites the overwhelming importance of the image of the phallus to the ancients. In a different context however, in a section of Aristotle and Freud, he wrote: '...we must use things like that, old words, as stupid as anything, but really use them, work them to the bone'" (Luepnitz, 2003, p.227)

Once again, we see the effect that the historical period in which the psychoanalytic discourse on the family was formed has had on the ability to potentially conceptualise, and certainly to speak, forms of family life, and specifically forms of fatherhood, outside of this discourse. While Lacan, much more than Freud, may be aware that his terms imply a heavily gendered aspect to certain psychological

processes that are not necessarily inherent, he is equally aware of the potential inability to be understood outside of this discourse. He is also aware of the deconstructive potential of working these terms “to the bone”, employing them within a critique of their own limitations, thus exposing their ultimate inadequacy, rather than simply validating them through continued use.

While Lacan, following Freud, makes an appeal to the centrality of the phallus to ‘the ancients’ to justify the use of such terms in his work, we need not look to a potentially unknowable prehistory to justify the gendered nature of their discourses. Just as Freud’s work is a product of the context in which it was conceived, Lacan’s work is a product of both his engagement with Freud and the similarities and differences in his own context. It is possible for both Freud and Lacan to build theories around the discursive power of the absent patriarch that relatively accurately reflect the psychological and literal experiences of the society in which they are working due to the separation of the work and domestic spheres, and their heavily gendered natures, during the period.

The common removal of the father from the domestic sphere in industrialized economies allows the father to partially assume the totemistic paternal function that Lacan, following Freud, assumed to be the motivation behind ‘the ancients’ reification of the phallus. Yet, as we have observed, connecting a potentially mythical prehistory with the then contemporary context in which they are working presents the troublesome possibility of universalising their arguments through an appeal to their innate nature and ignoring their historical specificity. It is surely too much of a coincidence to believe that these apparently innate drives that have shaped the psychological development of humans since time immemorial had remained

undiscovered until such a time when their discovery is supported by their resonance in contemporary culture.

Yet the resonance that psychoanalysis uncovered between prior texts and cultures, most obviously the myths and plays of Ancient Greece, and common symptoms experienced by those living in Western, industrialised societies does, once again, suggest the cyclical nature of the power of the father dependent on their presence within, or absence from, the domestic sphere. The key development in Lacan's work that resists extrapolating this resonance into universal principles, however, and opens up wider opportunities for debate, is his greater awareness of the complexities of discourse. Already, in the relatively short time between Freud's death in 1939 and Lacan's in 1981, the vocabulary of psychoanalysis has arguably become unstable through use. The founding mythologies of Ancient Greece's gender order, as reflected in Oedipus and other plays, may have inserted narratives of the power of absent fatherhood into a discursive context in which the shift from hunter-gatherer society to a primarily agrarian economy highlighted their potential inadequacy to explain the contemporary context in which they were writing, thus requiring naming of, and intellectual engagement, with these once untroubling processes. Equally, by appealing to a prior model of father absence suggested by the hunter/gatherer distinction, psychoanalysis potentially ignores more recent forms of social organisation in favour of a model that more accurately reflects their own contemporary context.

As Lacan's concern with "working to the bone" the old, phallogocentric vocabulary of psychoanalysis demonstrates, however, the paradox of identifying and placing fatherhood into discourse primarily *as* an absence changes this discourse as it analyses it. Rather than simply identifying universal processes predicated on the

continued absence of masculinity from the domestic sphere that is an assumed feature of all periods in human history, psychoanalytic discourse is, itself, a product of a period in which a conception of non-domestic masculinity is being formed as a response to the demands of an industrialised economy. As John Tosh reminds us, this process is not unspoken, however, with popular discourse on fatherhood and masculinity shifting in the Victorian era from one in which domesticity is integrated to one that is almost totally removed from domesticity (Tosh, 1999, p.79). As a reflection of this discursive moment it serves us to question, as many have, the universalising impulse of Freudian theory by asking whether it would have been possible for Freud to identify the centrality of a paternal role based on absence from the domestic sphere if this discursive shift had not already taken place. Would these unconscious, and apparently innate, drives have been as apparent if Freud had encountered patients from agrarian economies in which masculinity were potentially more integrated into the domestic sphere?

The interesting point to note here is that Freud, and certainly Lacan, appear to be both simultaneously ahead or behind depending on the specific discourses to which we apply their thinking, suggesting, as we did earlier, that their work is the result of a turning point in discourse on the family, rather than a setting in stone of unchangeable ideas. As we shall see, their prominent position in the formation of an academic discourse on families and fatherhood reflects a continuing assumption of paternal absence from the domestic sphere that does little to trouble their fundamental models. Yet, as the historical discourse analysis of Tosh makes clear, they also reflect a continuing discourse that names the anxieties that such an absence creates and, consequently, paradoxically reinsert the paternal into the domestic as an absence. Lacan's acknowledgement of the inadequacy of his vocabulary and his resistance to

writing down his theories potentially reflects an acknowledgement of the complexities of this position.

Freud and Lacan have both been criticised for the phallocentrism of their analyses, and the nuclear, patriarchal model of the family that underpins them certainly does remain a strong feature of much contemporary discourse on the family. As feminist development of their theories exhibit, however, by foregrounding the model that they supposedly universalise as a primary object of study they also open up the possibility of critique. As the difference between Freud's willingness to restate certain unquestionably phallic assumptions and Lacan's discomfort with doing so suggests, their attempts to grapple with the place of the father both reflect and shape the wider discourse in which they are working. This places them, alongside many theorists working within the same moment of discursive flux, in the paradoxical position of being both totemic patriarchs within contemporary discourses of fatherhood and family and vengeful sons handing us the knife with which we may sacrifice them for our greater freedom.

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Bringing It All Back Home: Domesticity, Fatherhood and Contemporary Theory

With so much theory on the family and fatherhood replicating this fundamental assumption of paternal absence within analysis of the nuclear model, it is possible to both observe the continuing influence of these founding mythologies within the contemporary field and the process of discursive development that they have instigated. The separation and heavy gendering of both the domestic and economic spheres, underpinning the theories that we have discussed thus far, presents problems for any analysis of fatherhood. If the primary site of the enactment of family life is

the domestic sphere, from which masculinity is predominantly excluded, how does one conceive of a form of masculinity that is intimately related to this site? One solution, following the work of the theorists discussed previously is to insert a form of masculinity into a discourse of the domestic that is primarily defined by its absence from this particular realm. Another solution is to insert a form of masculinity into the discourse that arguably allows the figure of the father to embody the tensions inherent in this process of insertion.

Many proceeding academic discourses on fatherhood have based their analysis on a very literal response to these two approaches. As Tony Chapman identifies in his analysis of sociological approaches to the domestic sphere, when fatherhood is discussed it often reflects a concern with either an absent or problematic fatherhood, or, indeed, both:

“...men have either been regarded as ‘off-stage’ actors in the sociological literature because it is assumed that they are principally concerned with the world of work. Or conversely, where they are considered they are portrayed as problematic members of the household.” (Chapman, 2004, p.3)

Sociology has perhaps offered the most regular, comprehensive and sustained critique of the dynamics of the family and the domestic sphere, unable, as a field concerned with the investigation of human social activity, to ignore such a central pillar of people’s social experience. Yet, even taking into account its aspiration towards empiricism, sociological discourse cannot help but be shaped by certain dominant assumptions that underpin received notions of its field of study. Assuming that attempts to report on the lived experience of family life could be free from reproducing these received notions would be to underestimate the power that they have to shape the lives of the individuals and institutions being studied, to say nothing of the conscious and subconscious assumptions held by the researchers themselves.

As Chapman's argument suggests, when it comes to sociological work that takes the domestic sphere as its object of study, many researchers have run into the difficulties that face all work that makes an appeal to empiricism while simultaneously existing within discourse. The first of these is that the nuclear family, its associations with the domestic, and the place of the father within it, is not only the dominant mythology of family life within industrialized society but, as we have seen earlier, is also, in reality, a common family form. Many of the conclusions drawn by researchers working within the field will invariably support the dominant model through exhibiting significant demographic similarities, feeding back into the discourse and supporting a sense of its 'correctness'. While this could not be said to be a problem, as such, and simply reflects the sociologist's remit to observe and analyse, it adds growing weight to this already dominant discourse, which can then potentially structure the underlying assumptions of future research in a similar way.

The second difficulty is precisely a consequence of this kind of discursive dominance, and that is that these underlying assumptions will shape the work that is undertaken, leading to studies that are based on more rigid notions of the nuclear family than are necessarily appropriate. While we identified the dominance of the nuclear model in the broader discourse of that family, this dominance also extends to analyses of the position of the father within that model. Just as the work of Freud and Lacan broadly assumes the absence of the literal father from the domestic sphere, so do many of the studies that attempt to explain the father's position within the contemporary family.

Yet, despite the fundamental assumption of absence, fatherhood has been dealt with in some detail within the humanities, as Tony Chapman suggests, either through inserting fatherhood into the discourse through discussion of their absence

from the domestic realm, or through analysing notions of problematic fatherhood which demonstrate the tensions of this paradoxical discursive position. Once again, we see the transformative effect that increased discourse on a certain concept can have on the concept under discussion. By making the general absence of fatherhood from the domestic realm a prerequisite of their theories early 20th century theorists of the family, such as Freud, Lacan and De Beauvoir, opened up the possibility for critique of this position. Far from enshrining a particular rigid model, their discussion of the dynamics of the nuclear family placed the model under a level of scrutiny that required some form of justification.

By the 1950s, the now familiar threshold at which the apparent demographic dominance of the nuclear model coincided with an increased discursive focus in the ever-burgeoning humanities on the systems underpinning it, the legacy of the discursive tension initiated by these earlier analyses is readily apparent. In the United States in particular, where a retroactively coherent model of nuclear domestic bliss has become our clichéd conception of that era's discourse on the family, concerns about both the presence *and* absence of the father in or from the home inspired commentary from both academic and popular commentators.

Emerging from a wartime concern for the nation's virility, Douglas and Michaels (2004, p.4) discuss the development of the idea of 'momism':

"The term 'momism' was initially coined by the journalist Philip Wylie in his highly influential 1942 bestseller *Generation of Vipers*, and it was a very derogatory term. Drawing from Freud...Wylie attacked the mothers of America as being so smothering, overprotected and invested in their kids, especially their sons, that they turned them into dysfunctional, snivelling weaklings, maternal slaves chained to the apron strings, unable to fight for their country or even stand on their own two feet".

While the concept of 'Momism' may have laid the blame for the perceived emasculation of the American male at the feet of the women who bore them,

following psychoanalysis in placing the gendered division of childcare at the centre of the creation of gendered subjectivities implicitly evokes the spectre of paternal absence. If 'mom' is altogether too present in the lives of her children then father is surely altogether too absent. While 'Momism's' focus on the role of women in the domestic sphere reflects both an increasing feminist discourse and subsequent reaction to its perceived threat to the apparent status quo, it also demonstrates the discursive tension surrounding the figure of the father through its implicit assumption of paternal absence. Whether the father is removed from the home either permanently through death or divorce or temporarily through work, it is the ensuing close relationship with the mother that becomes responsible for the perceived effeminacy of the American male. Interestingly, as we have seen earlier in this chapter, feminist challenges to the dominance of the nuclear family also pinpointed the absence of the father from the childrearing process as being central to the construction of a patriarchal gender order.

From two different perspectives, with two very different political and social ambitions, the figure of the absent father becomes a core element of arguments concerning both the deconstruction and maintenance of a patriarchal gender order, as reproduced through the process of childrearing. What this exhibits, once again, is an increased discursive focus potentially separated from the historical period in which that discourse is formed. While the feminist analyses of father absence make an appeal to a perceived prehistory to demonstrate the historical precedent for their ideas, the exponents of 'Momism' seem to suggest that increased feminine power within the domestic sphere is a newer development, instigating unwelcome changes to a previously accepted model of the creation of masculine subjectivities.

In essence, both are developments of the discourse on the nuclear family that, as we have observed through our own analysis of the development of this discourse, is a product of a specific discursive moment, broadly running from the end of the Victorian era (“The Climax of Domesticity” to return to John Tosh’s phrase) until the explosion of family discourse in the 1950s. As suggested earlier, the increased quantification and critique of the nuclear family throughout this period did not simply preserve an existing model, but also played a key role in its deconstruction.

Drawing a theoretical line between the pioneering work of Freud, Lacan and De Beauvoir, and their consistent appeal to the role of paternal absence from the domestic realm in the construction of gendered subjectivities, through the overwhelmingly negative analyses of this absence on both sides of the political spectrum offered by both ‘momism’ and feminist analysis of the discourse on motherhood, to a continuing concern with the social effects of father absence in the home, we can see the way in which the removal of the masculine from the domestic sphere has shaped discourse on the family throughout the 20th century. While there are key differences between the symbolic absence central to psychoanalytic analysis and the literal absence central to sociological analyses, it is possible to observe the way in which the symbolic and the literal have informed, and altered, each other to create an overarching discourse of fatherhood predicated on this absence.

A pessimistic view of the social effects of this discourse, such as that espoused by David Blankenhorn (1995, p.3), might suggest that the literal and symbolic have become conflated to the point at which “the most important absence our society must confront is not the absence of fathers but the absence of our belief in fathers”. These sort of wistful appeals to notions of an integrated domestic masculinity that, as we have seen, arguably disappeared as a dominant model during

the Victorian era paint the father as an endangered species that must be preserved lest their perceived absence from discourse is a harbinger of the extinction from the real world. As if, were we all to clap our hands together and cry out “I believe in fathers” loud enough a coherent model of patriarchy would be restored.

In reality, the discursive position of fatherhood is much more complex. As the very existence of Blankenhorn’s analysis suggests, fathers are actually highly present within our discourse on the family. The problem arises not from an absence of discourse on fatherhood, but from the difficulty of reconciling the insertion of fatherhood into discourse *as* an absence with both the literal presence of fathers in reality and the increasing discursive focus on fatherhood in theory. The founding mythologies of the nuclear family arguably enshrined a coherent model of family life, while at the same time placing it under a level of scrutiny that allowed for deconstruction of that model. Similarly, the assumption of paternal absence from the domestic sphere, forming the foundation of the father’s position within that model, does not lead to a total absence from discourse but, instead, offers a starting point from which to critique this central model.

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Embodying Tension: Fatherhood’s Presence within the domestic.

With an ever-increasing discourse on the family being produced by burgeoning fields within the humanities, an increase in discourses on fatherhood is inevitable. While the assumptions of paternal absence from the domestic sphere may remain part of this discourse, both through a rehashing of these same ideas and through the underlying assumptions that underpin contemporary analysis, they must also confront the problem of reconciling this apparent absence with fatherhood’s increased discursive

presence. As a result of an increased focus on the gendered aspects of family life, exhibited by academic acceptance of both feminist theory and the study of masculinities, simplistic models that relied on the division of labour at the heart of the nuclear family have regularly been called into question. Unlike the increased focus on the nuclear family model leading to quantification at the moment the form becomes least tenable, however, the resulting discourse of fatherhood seems to be something of a development of the crisis rhetoric identified by John Tosh as a feature of Victorian masculinity. Returning to our ‘canary in the mineshaft’ analogy, by the 1950s, that apparent moment of unparalleled discursive coherence for the nuclear family, the patriarch has already been unseated from his dominant position within the family.

The reciprocal relationship between discourse and social change that removed the father from the domestic sphere as one result of increased industrial working practices also had to respond to continuing social changes that progressively inserted women into the world of work, questioning the rigid gendering of the domestic and economic spheres. No sooner had the model of absent patriarchy been quantified at the turn of the 20th century than there was a necessity to attempt reinsert the father into the home due to this process. We have already seen the way in which the founding discourses of contemporary family theory attempted to factor the father into discourse as an absence from the home. As the economic protectionism that allowed this model to adequately reflect the lived experience of the majority continually shifted and warped around this burgeoning discourse, however, father’s presence within the home began to reassert itself, both in idealised and demonised forms.

Returning to Tony Chapman’s assertion that sociological discourses have generally perceived men as “off stage actors” or “problematic members of the household” (Chapman, 2004, p.3), we must now turn our attention to the latter

approach to bring us more up to date with the contemporary position of fatherhood in our broader discourse on the family.

As gender became a more prominent subject for study within the academy, inevitably the critical gaze would fall on all aspects of life, and family life has been no exception. While coding of the domestic sphere as feminine had the inevitable result of focusing most of the resulting analysis on women's place within that sphere, as we have already established, men's presence within this discourse is a requirement of sound analysis, if only through a discussion of their absence. But there are fields of enquiry where the presence of masculinity within the domestic sphere has also been regularly questioned. In feminist responses to domestic violence and child abuse, for example, the way in which the power of the patriarch is enacted have, quite rightly, become key areas for critique. While these issues simply cannot be ignored, a combination of their emotive and essential nature with the fact that they extend from a field more concerned with analysing the position of women in relation to these problems can lead to the reproduction of a dangerously limited notion of domestic masculinity. As Lupton and Barclay bemoaned, even the increasing amount of work that takes masculinity as its primary subject matter has often fallen victim to this rigid definition of fatherhood as absent (by ignoring it entirely) or problematic, thus reinforcing a discourse on fatherhood that it should, potentially, be questioning. Little, if any, attention is paid to either the subjective experience of fatherhood, or to a notion of masculinity integrated into the domestic sphere, as their analysis of the broader field makes clear:

“The father identified as ‘normal’ or ‘unproblematic’ tends to be absent or largely ignored in this body of literature. Not only is fatherhood represented as replete with difficulties and strains for the father himself, but fathers are portrayed primarily as potentially pathogenic variables in relation to their children's health and psychological status.” (Lupton and Barclay, 1997, p.50)

There have, of course, been alternative responses to the problem of integrating masculinity into the domestic sphere that have not focused on the negative impact of both father's presence and absence within the family. Many of these have come as a response to the increasing focus on masculinity within academia and popular culture, and make an appeal to either a previously coherent, and possibly imagined, model of patriarchal power, or to a hopeful, more egalitarian model for the future.

Sometimes these two approaches attempted to coexist within the same broader movement, such as the mythopoetic men's movement of the 1970s. Robert Bly's *Iron John*, the movement's founding text, provided a slightly distorted compliment to the work of Adrienne Rich, by suggesting that it was separation from their fathers that instigated emotional damage in men, attempting to shift the focus from feminism's perceived 'blaming' of men to an awareness of the way in which the status quo affected men also. Unfortunately, Bly's proposed solution, a return to initiation ceremonies between men and a reinstatement of apparently lost archetypes, only served to bolster the notion that, in order to truly express their masculine nature, men must be separated from the domestic sphere. The cultural impact of Bly's work does demonstrate both the increased discursive focus on the position of the father within the family and the contradictions that plagued attempts to move beyond previous notions of fatherhood. By the 1970s, the patriarchal masculinity that had, arguably, been assumed by Freud had become untenable not just through the increase of work that sought to question the validity of this model, but also through the contradictions inherent in increasing the discursive presence of a model predicated on absence. While a model of absence from the domestic sphere remains a central plank of many discussions of fatherhood, from 'Momism' to mythopoetics, their interrogations of this traditional model both questioned and reflected its potential inability to accurately

mirror common lived experiences of family life, while also creating the potential for new models to emerge.

With the advent of the much commented upon 'New Man', and subsequent 'New Father', models that emerged in the 1980s, it is possible to observe both the continuation of this discursive movement and the difficulties inherent in creating a coherent model of domestic masculinity within the broader discourse on family life. The discourse of the 'New Man' has often been equally heralded and derided as a product of feminist challenges to the assumption of masculine power, both in the domestic realm and in the workplace. While it is debateable as to whether feminism, and subsequent appeals from both men and women to new models of masculinity, held such sway on the popular imagination as to create the 'New Man' from nothing, it is apparent that changes in the economic involvement of women had placed discussions about the domestic involvement of men into the discourse of the family. Gillian Ranson (2001, p.3) discusses how a model of engaged, nurturing fatherhood that came to be labelled the 'New Father', developed as the lines between provider and carer blurred for both genders:

“With the economic and social shifts that brought mothers in increasing numbers into the paid labour force in industrial economies since the 1960s, many fathers have been increasingly called to account for the quality of their engagement with their families. The replacement of full-time paid employment on the part of many white middle-class women has called the level of men’s participation in domestic work and child care into question.”

In her discussion of Ralph LaRossa’s work on the 'New Father', she goes on to suggest, however, that despite the discursive logic of questioning the gendering of the domestic and economic sphere in the face of significant social and cultural change in both, the real impact of these ideas may have been limited.

“LaRossa...spoke of the asynchrony between the culture of fatherhood and its conduct. He suggested that the new father represents our impressions and deductions about what father's ought to be doing, rather than reflecting any major changes in the material reality of fathering behaviour.” (Ranson, 2001, p.5)

Lupton and Barclay comment on the assumptions underpinning this more egalitarian model of the division of domestic labour, limiting its impact on the material reality and exhibiting the difficulty with which new models of fatherhood can gain discursive coherence:

“The ‘new’ father archetype...tends to elide differences between men. When subcultural groups *are* singled out for attention in relation to the fatherhood debate, they are often positioned as negative counterparts to the bourgeois ideal of the ‘new’ father; as ‘absent’ fathers, ‘dangerous’ fathers or ‘deadbeat dads’. The diversity, richness and constantly changing nature of the fatherhood experience for individual men is lost in the use of these categories. They all present somewhat confining and reductive accounts of how men engage in fatherhood.” (Lupton and Barclay, 1997, p.15)

While the ‘New Father’ may be a bold attempt to create an alternative model of domestic masculinity it also represented a predominantly bourgeois ideal, predicated on an assumption of sufficient economic and cultural capital to offer both provision and nurturing activities. For any men unable to assume either one or both of these responsibilities there were numerous negative alternatives with which they could identify.

By the 1990s, the tensions surrounding both the ‘New Man’ and ‘New Father’ models had caused them to all but collapse under the weight of discursive scrutiny. ‘New Man’ was replaced by ‘New Lad’; a largely reactionary model foregrounding adolescent irresponsibility and paying lip service to shifting discourses of masculinity through a constant recourse to irony. Equally, a tension between positive and negative models of fatherhood continued to dominate, not only in academia but also in the

broader discourse. One quantitative study of references to fatherhood in the British press during June 1994, for example, concluded that:

“Most the newspaper items saw fathers as either heroes or villains. Monster stories were as popular as the glossy rich and famous men looking good with their children. Father’s did heroic things, or side-stepped their responsibilities, but very little in between” (Lloyd, 1995, p.4)

As the language Lloyd has selected to describe the trends he identifies in press coverage of fatherhood-related stories indicates, despite a relentless questioning of the position of men within the domestic sphere that extends from Tosh’s “Climax of Domesticity” in the Victorian era, through the quantification and questioning of the nuclear model central to psychoanalysis, and encompassing the multiple challenges to the patriarchal model inspired by feminism, Masculinity Studies and sociological analysis of social and economic shifts, debates about fatherhood seem to remain stubbornly anchored in the core mythology that have structured the discourse from the beginning.

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The Man Who Wasn’t There: The Tension Between Assumed Absence and Discursive Presence

To identify the continuing mythological baggage that any analysis of fatherhood necessarily carries, however, is not to suggest that the restatement of these central ideas ensures complete discursive coherence. In fact, by situating contemporary debates in an extended history of discussion of the subject it is possible to identify a broader process of significant discursive change throughout the 20th century and into the 21st, while also recognising those elements that have remained constant.

Remaining at the heart of any debate about fatherhood is the assumption of absence from the domestic sphere. As we have seen from our analysis of some of the

earliest texts to engage with this notion, while they often make appeals to humanity's prehistory to discover the provenance of this seemingly innate gendering of the domestic and economic spheres, in reality this model is in opposition to its most recent forbearer: the integrated domestic masculinity of the Victorian era identified by John Tosh. Just as the historical moment analysed by Tosh suggests that this notion of domestic masculinity was discursively dominant precisely as it became untenable, however, it is also possible to identify a central irony in the increased presence of an absent model of fatherhood within discourse on the family.

This discursive presence of an absent fatherhood not only reflected the limitations of creating a material reality of fatherhood entirely removed from the domestic due to this separation of spheres, and the inapplicability of this model across many economic, class and racial contexts. It also placed the mythical and symbolic aspects of fatherhood under a scrutiny that questioned this model as it identified it. While the universalising impulse behind Freud's assumption of the nuclear model potentially disguised his work's potential for critiquing that family form, his discussion of a paternal power based on absence similarly imbued this process with a visibility that undermined this requirement of absence. Once again, this double discursive effect of increasing mythological weight and decreasing material influence suggests that the work of Freud, Lacan and De Beauvoir in the early decades of the 20th century enshrines a coherent model of fatherhood within the nuclear family at the same time as that model becomes untenable. The ability to openly critique these models not only reflects their waning influence in the real world, previously sustained by an unspoken assumption of their 'correctness', but also opens the door to further deconstruction through increased discursive focus, even while this increased discursive focus potentially threatens to overshadow alternatives. By the advent of

‘Momism’ in the late-1940s, the supposed apotheosis of the nuclear family’s discursive and demographic dominance, while these models of domestic femininity and absent masculinity remain central they are also figured as problematic.

It is this problematic notion of fatherhood, both absent and present, that characterises discourses on fatherhood and the family throughout the second half of the 20th century. As attempts to insert various forms of masculinity into the domestic, through feminist challenges to the notion of gendered spheres, attempts by men to quantify the ways in which rigid definitions of gender negatively effect their lives and relationships, or attempts to create new forms of nurturing, involved fatherhood all demonstrate, a coherent, unproblematic model of fatherhood based entirely on absence from the domestic realm is almost an impossibility.

As the potential inapplicability of the ‘New Father’ model of bourgeois masculinity to the lived experience of family life, or the relentless academic and media focus on the varying levels of negative impact that paternal presence can have on the life of the family suggest, attempting to reinsert masculinity into a nuclear, domestic sphere from which it has been routinely exiled from the discourse’s inception leads to a discursive tension that finds its expression in the polarisation of absurdly ‘good’ or woefully ‘bad’ fathers.

This polarisation of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ fathering often continues to express material truths about the position of fathers within contemporary families, as do assumptions of paternal absence. It is not only in the realm of discourse that the tensions between the assumptions underpinning notions of fatherhood within the nuclear family and the problematic realities of adopting the duties of both provision and nurturing for both sexes are felt, as rising divorce rates and the continuing spectre of domestic abuse both attest. What this polarisation also exhibits, however, is the

difficulty of creating discursive models of fatherhood that exist outside of these two, relatively extreme positions.

The tension that these extremes of fatherhood embody is a symptom of a family discourse in flux. Just as the enshrining of the nuclear family as the dominant mythology of family life in industrialised, Western countries coincided with an historical moment at which the gendered division of labour underpinning this system became untenable, the increasing discursive focus on fatherhood, even if that focus centred on absence from the domestic realm, questioned the unspoken nature of that dominance.

The 1950s, far from presenting a watershed after which the ‘traditional’ family values that characterised the preceding history of the family were continually dismantled, in reality represented a continuation of a discursive movement in which a coherent model of family life, and fatherhood’s place within it, were opened up to debate. By the second half of the 20th century, father’s absence from the domestic sphere underpinning the assumptions of Freudian theory was, arguably, no longer tenable. The increasing dominance of a model of family life predicated on the gendering of domestic and economic spheres that had formed these assumptions, however, meant that academic and theoretical attempts to integrate masculinity into the domestic sphere throughout the second half of the 20th century reflected the tension that an increased discursive focus predicated on an assumption of absence created. Just as the nuclear family’s mythological dominance belies the level of critique under which it has been placed, representations of fatherhood, in academia, news media and popular culture, have dramatised the tension between the erosion of both material and discursive power and an increased discursive focus through creating polarised models of fatherhood that embody this dialectic.

4: Representing Discursive Tension In Situation Comedy

There is little doubt in the literature concerning both the family, and fatherhood more specifically, that the 1950s was a crucial decade in which the way the family was represented changed. In popular culture, as well as in academic discourse, it has come to represent the high watermark of the nuclear family's demographic dominance, offering the norm to which each contemporary deviation has since been compared. It would be doing a disservice to texts from this period, however, to suggest that they simply present an entirely simplistic concept of the nuclear family as the singular, coherent model encompassing a complete representation of the lived reality of family life.

In fact, one of the legacies of the decade may well be a greater discursive focus on the family and the accompanying questioning of this model that a sharper focus almost inevitably inspires. Just as the entry of the family into academic discourses of sociology, psychology and anthropology offered an opportunity for critique, the prevalence of the nuclear family in the popular culture of the 1950s may have offered the opportunity for greater interrogation of some of its constituent parts through its increased visibility. Once again, the necessity of questioning the received wisdom of the discursive dominance of the nuclear family throughout the decade as some sort of attempt to impose a monolithic, regulatory discourse becomes obvious. While the dominance of a particular model may have sometimes been variously presented as ideal, inevitable or unavoidable, the majority of popular cultural texts that focus on the family make room for a much greater degree of ambiguity in their representation of the family and, particularly, in their representation of fatherhood.

Some of the major factors that suggest the 1950s as a key turning point in the representation of the family relate to broader changes in the availability and

dissemination of popular culture throughout the decade. Television, in particular, rises to a position of cultural dominance that arguably remains unchallenged until the analogous rise of Internet use at the turn of the millennium. In the US, 4.4 million households owned television sets in 1950. By 1960, 50 million sets had been sold (Taylor, 1989, p.20). In the UK a similarly rapid explosion of television ownership is observable in the early part of the decade, with the uptake of television licences rising from 360,000 in 1950 to 3 million in 1954 (bbc.co.uk). This rise in ownership coincides with several key events in the history of British television, including the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953 and the introduction of commercial television in 1955, that mean it is not unreasonable to argue that, by the middle of the decade, television had overtaken print media and the radio as the most influential medium in the country's cultural life.

Television and family life can often seem inextricably linked. The television set has often been called the 'modern hearth' and generally occupies a key position within the family home thus forcing it to integrate more fully with the rhythms of family life than other mediums. This would have been particularly true prior to the advent of the multi-television, multi-channel context in which most contemporary programming is broadcast. Television's privileged place within the domestic sphere has often led to a reciprocal privileging of the family within core programming as arguably the most populist of mediums attempted to find ways to appeal to every occupant of the 'average' living room. As Ien Ang (1996, p.23) suggests, "television adapts the material it presents to the situation within which television viewing is normally assumed to take place: in the private homes of isolated nuclear families". Soap operas and sitcoms, for example, often based around the trials and tribulations of family life, have provided some of the most durable and successful output for

television and can be found amongst the highest rated programmes throughout the medium's history.

As a method of disseminating and reinforcing cultural ideals the relationship between television and family life would seem to play a key role in ensuring the dominance of the nuclear family model in the 1950s and beyond. The discursive power of a relatively homogenous image of a social construct beamed directly into the site of that construct's enactment in the real world cannot be underestimated. While dominant trends are still many and obvious, there is arguably no equivalent level of coherence in literature, news media, or even film's portrayal of family life. The different ways in which each of these media are designed to be consumed certainly accounts, at least partially, for this distinction. Unlike novels and newspapers, which are designed to be consumed individually, or films, which are primarily designed to be consumed in the more concentrated atmosphere of the darkened auditorium, television traditionally had to compete for attention with the interlocking rhythms of domestic life. As Ien Ang suggests:

“This everyday domestic setting makes it very difficult for television to make its presence more than merely casually noticed and to hold the audience's attention- as a matter of fact, the private home does not seem to be a very favourable context for a concentrated spectatorial activity, as the cinema is.” (1996, p.23)

Consequently, many of the most successful television programmes have made an attempt to appeal to the most potential viewers by mirroring the context in which these messages are received and offering a point of identification for each potential viewer. Previously it has been noted how usefully the nuclear model lends itself to academic accounts of family life, offering the most economical example of gendered and generational variety from which to explore the intricacies of the family experience. The same logic can be applied to popular cultural depictions of the

family. While the audience's experience of family life may not exactly mirror the nuclear model depicted, their experience will doubtlessly correspond, at least in part, to either the generational or gendered positions of the characters. This is why the traditional image of the nuclear family, as depicted on television, often includes both daughters and sons in order to maximise the numbers of potential points of identification for a spread of audience members.

In the 1950s, when choice of both methods of television reception and television programming were relatively minimal, television was still finding a place within viewer's lives. With no way of recording programmes at home, not only was watching television more likely to be a communal experience amongst the family but also within the community more generally. With a relative paucity of channel options and a lack of flexibility in scheduling, texts were shared by large numbers of the population, consequently helping to structure, and to change, the common schedule of family life. This, combined with the inevitable mixture of nostalgia and emotional distance, contributes to the possibility of bringing to mind a common vision of the 1950s family, both as depicted and as lived. The most relevant example of this may be found in the image of the suburban, nuclear family all seated in front of the television enjoying a 'TV dinner'. The very term 'TV dinner', of course, suggesting that the primary result of new food preparation techniques was to allow families to eat their evening meal in front of their favourite programme, alerting us to the new centrality of television in the traditional routines of family life.

While television may have been changing the way in which family life was lived the image of family life that television reflected to its viewers remained, at least on the surface, relatively homogenous. While there may be something inescapably American about the popular image of the suburban nuclear family of the 1950s,

certain similar tropes would most probably also be invoked by British audiences when asked to recollect popular notions of the family in this decade. Prominent amongst these would likely be the image of the breadwinning husband and the economically unproductive wife. While, as discussed in earlier chapters, this set-up as a dominant model of family life was not all encompassing, it is the model that is most commonly evoked in both American and British television texts from this era. In fact, it has been argued that assumptions made about the prevalence of this model have had such an effect on popular television that it has long structured both the type of programmes commissioned and the schedule in which they are shown:

“...a central notion in any understanding of the structures of television programming, in its aesthetic, economic or cultural modes, is that it is addressed to viewers in the home. It is a domestic medium and the space of domestic life, the family household, invokes a set of understandings which inform scheduling and consequently the commissioning of programmes.” (Paterson, 1990, p.33)

The ‘watershed’, whereby certain content and language deemed not suitable for children must not be broadcast before 9pm, is the most obvious example of this principle in action. Less literal, but no less influential, are the assumptions that underpin the notions of ‘daytime television’ and ‘primetime television’. ‘Daytime television’, putting the ironic adoption of certain texts by the student community to one side, has generally been geared towards female-centred programming such as talks shows, soap opera and, more recently, a glut of make-over shows based around the traditionally feminine activities of self-improvement and interior decoration. While the ‘primetime’ schedules still include similar programmes a wider variety of texts is generally observable in the post-working day timeslots, after the brief buffer zone of after-school children’s television has been successfully traversed. That this pattern remains apparent in the contemporary scheduling of most of the major

channels, despite competition from a wealth of dedicated channels for almost every conceivable demographic subset, demonstrates how central the notion of the nuclear family has been throughout the history of television.

The broadcast day has long been built around the notion that the non-economically productive housewife will incorporate daytime television into her schedule when possible. Children will then dominate television choice once they get home from school until father gets home from the office, when he will either assume control of the remote or, ideally, the entire family will watch a programme together that appeals to all. Particularly prior to the advent of satellite and digital viewing this would have been the way in which most available channels structured their broadcast day, placing the idealised notion of the nuclear family at the centre of the creation of television programmes and marking television out as a medium whose content is perhaps even more heavily distinguished along gendered and generational lines than most. Unlike cinema, where it is easier to ignore those films not aimed at your demographic, television programmes aimed at all demographics of the nuclear family are broadcast within the same flow of programming. Regardless of whether you have children, for example, your television set will receive at least a degree of children's programming. Equally, until recently, it would have been difficult to find programming during the working day aimed at a male audience, regardless of the myriad circumstances that may dictate which gender might be watching television at that time of day. It is this that suggests a fundamental ideological aspect to television programming, the result of both its assumed place within the family home and the discursive dominance of the nuclear family form during the period in which television's popularity exploded and the traditions that helped structure the medium, many aspects of which are still evident today, were formed. This goes some way to

explaining the passion with which the ideologies which television has presented to its audience have been debated, on both sides of the Atlantic, as it has arguably become an integral part of the way in which we structure our notions of family since it assumed such a degree of cultural influence. For example, fact and fiction were conflated in debates about the rise of single parenthood when Dan Quayle chose to launch the 1992 Republican campaign on ‘family values’ with an attack on the heroine of the popular US TV show, *Murphy Brown* (1988-98)². While in the UK, campaigns such as “Clean Up TV”, spearheaded by the formidable Mary Whitehouse, were demonstrating concern about television’s affect on the morality of the nation as early as the mid-1960s.

As these debates prove, however, it is important to acknowledge that television, despite structuring both programming and scheduling with the nuclear family firmly in mind, has not always been viewed as upholding those values within the content that it broadcasts. In fact, ambiguities and tensions surrounding the nuclear family can be found in many of the most popular texts throughout the medium’s history. Just as a discursive explosion of family-related texts in the humanities appeared to enshrine the nuclear model as an ideal, or at the very least inevitable, family form while simultaneously placing this model under a heightened level of scrutiny, television’s relentless focus on the family has often led to a greater consideration of the way in which this model functions that threatens to expose the constructed nature of the myth it represents. While many of the most popular texts from the 1950s could be read as representing a favourable image of a coherent, nuclear family, we must make an effort to revise the simplistic notion that all was well with the televisual family prior to its deconstruction in later decades. As in the

² See Rebecca L. Walkowitz, “Reproducing Reality: Murphy Brown and Illegitimate Politics” in *Feminist Television Criticism: A Reader* (1997) for a more detailed discussion of this debate.

wider discourse of the family at the time, it is possible to view these texts as key starting points for a longer process of deconstruction of the myth of the nuclear family rather than a reflection of a prelapsarian ideological, or literal, reality of family life that has been steadily eroded over the proceeding decades.

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Father Knows Best: Rethinking Fatherhood and the Nuclear Family in the 1950s

The title of a popular American sitcom from the era, *Father Knows Best*, which was adapted from a popular radio sitcom and ran from 1954 to 1960, might reasonably lead one to assume that the programme validates a strongly patriarchal model of the nuclear family, and one would not have wildly misjudged the programme were one to do so. Often cited as an example of the way in which the nuclear family model was validated by the television programmes of this era, some have already suggested that the programme was a somewhat knowing attempt to enter into an already ongoing debate about family values for broadly commercial reasons. Susan Briggs identifies differences between this programme and those representations of family life that preceded it:

“Early American television families usually served as comic battlegrounds for farce and slapstick – with henpecked father, domineering mother, and awful children descended directly from seaside postcard or comic-film stereotypes. By the mid-1950s, however, advertising sponsors grasped that a more realistic- or idealistic- approach could pay, not least in commercials: viewers could be encouraged to aspire to live in the well-designed and well-equipped homes shown in more sophisticated television series. They might even become well-designed nuclear families.” (Briggs, 1995, p.206)

While this earlier description may be familiar to many as characterising our favourite television families over the years, proving that it was far from being usurped by a more idealistic image of nuclear family life, Briggs argues that *Father Knows Best*

could be seen as an important text not only because it broke from these traditions but also because it was “the earliest mass-audience television sitcom family”, thus inevitably defining key aspects of that particular model:

“Neat and nuclear, with Jim Anderson described at the time as the ‘first intelligent father on radio or television’ and his wife Margaret ‘a contented and attractive homemaker’, fulfilled by rearing her children and looking after her husband, The *Saturday Evening Post* praised the Andersons for being a ‘family that has surprising similarities to real people’. The show was applauded for making ‘polite, carefully middle-class, family-type entertainment.’” (Briggs, 1995, p.206)

It is this specific model that has become intertwined with common ideas of both the dominant discursive and demographic models of family life in the 1950s. But, as the ideologically loaded choice of words used by the *Saturday Evening Post* reviewer to describe the show suggest, this model may not have appeared so realistic to all strata of society. As a “polite, carefully middle-class” representation of family life, *Father Knows Best* appears to wear its aspirational values on its sleeve. In the world of the sitcom, the family is dominated by a breadwinning father and nurtured by an economically unproductive housewife.

As Mary Ann Watson demonstrates in her analysis of one episode first broadcast in 1958 (S2:E30 ‘Betty Girl Engineer’), these economic assumptions are also passed down to the next generation. In this episode, daughter Betty/Elinor Donahue is inspired by a series of vocational lectures to become an engineer, but her dream is consistently mocked by a series of characters until she rediscovers her femininity at the end of the episode and settles for a date with one of the most voracious critics of her proposed plan. Watson describes the episode as “...a striking but relatively common example of how young women in the postwar era were

conditioned to believe their greatest value was in their auxiliary status to a man” (Watson, 1998, p.57).

It is clear that shows like *Father Knows Best* were indeed attempting to sell an ideal of nuclear family life to the American public. But, as Ella Taylor suggests, this homogenisation of the image of family life had less to do with the demographic realities of the country at this point and more to do with the economic ideology underpinning the context in which they were produced:

“The family comedies of the 1950s articulated not so much the realities of postwar affluence as the received wisdom of post-New Deal capitalism: the end of ideology, a liberal-conservative dream of a harmonious society in which the conditions for social conflict would disappear because there would be plenty of everything to go round.” (Taylor, 1989, p.26)

Far from being a more realistic view of family life than had been previously shown on television, as the contemporary critics suggested, *Father Knows Best*, amongst other popular sitcoms, has often been read as propaganda for a particular model of family life which would have only been relevant to the white, middle-class families that it mirrored, and even then offering a remarkably sanitised version of their own experiences. Just as Freud attempted to extrapolate universal truths about the formation of a coherent identity through analysing the familial relationships of the nuclear model prevalent in the historical and class context in which he was working, the ideological coherence of *Father Knows Best* enshrined a mythology of the nuclear family that imbued it with the status of a self-evident, immutable truth based on the specific, highly mutable context in which it was created. Unlike the work of Freud, however, some have argued that, like the commercials that paid for its production and distribution, the programme was a conscious attempt to sell a product, in the shape of the ideal of the nuclear family, to the American public.

In the context of the return to the workforce of legions of demobbed soldiers after the end World War II, it could be argued that it was necessary to present positive images of domestic femininity that would inspire reluctant women, who had been incorporated into the workforce in greater numbers to compensate for the absence of men, to return to the home. The ideological thrust of the episode, ‘Betty: Girl Engineer’, would certainly support this argument, as the plot and dialogue both baldly state the fact that women aspiring to compete with men in the workplace are threatening male domination of the economic sphere. As Betty’s suitor Doyle/Roger Smith says: “If your nice, pretty girls are out working in the dust and heat too, who are the guys going to come home to?” (*Father Knows Best* 11/04/56: NBC). Equally, the postwar baby boom did inspire middle-class families to move to the suburbs in greater numbers, further separating the work and domestic spheres, but also inspiring an economic boom largely predicated on domestic consumption. By making the model of family life as presented in *Father Knows Best* an aspirational goal, the programme also helps to maintain this economic growth by advertising both the model of domesticity most suited to this new level of consumption within the programme’s content, and the products associated with it in the advertisements that fund its production.

It is difficult to quantify just how much the economic and demographic shifts occurring in the United States during this period informed the creation of sitcoms such as *Father Knows Best*, or how much these sitcoms motivated a continuation or acceleration of these shifts, and one can easily become mired in a potentially irresolvable analytical dead end. What is readily apparent, however, is that the discursive emphasis placed on the coherent nuclear family stems from an attempt to naturalise a form of family life that was, in fact, the result of a specific historical and

economic context. As outlined in our discussion of academic discourse on the family, however, while this mythologising of the nuclear model may well have enshrined the model as the starting point from which analysis begins, due to its discursive and demographic prominence in the context in which many of these debates were originated, this situation also inevitably leads to the swift deconstruction of the model. In the media discourse on family life, as in the academic discourse, the prevalence of the patriarchal nuclear model seems to lead to its own deconstruction. While the image of popular television programmes, such as *Father Knows Best*, attempting to impose a monolithic notion of family life onto a pliable public may be pleasingly simplistic, in reality the speed with which more nuanced models overtook them seems to suggest that, as with all forms of advertising, large numbers of the public were unable, or unwilling, to buy into the product they were selling.

In Britain particularly, perhaps partially because of the later introduction of commercial television, popular images of the family and fatherhood during the 1950s were generally less sanitised. The nuclear family's key role within the attainment of the 'American dream' of suburban prosperity did not reflect the experience of a country still suffering the impoverishing effects of an extended conflict. Consequently, while the popular, nostalgic image of the suburban, nuclear family has gradually come to define the standardised image of the 1950s ideal of family life, even a brief consideration of British television families of the era suggests that this may be more a result of increasing American cultural influence, and the shared nostalgia for a coherent myth of family life, than a reflection of the discourse of the era.

In *Slow Motion*, Lynne Segal begins her discussion of changing masculinities with a detailed overview of many of the key gendered aspects of British society in the

1950s, once again identifying this particular decade as an era in which dramatic social change affected both the lived experience, and the discursive representation, of both the family and fatherhood. Her argument seems to suggest, however, that this decade is key not for its espousal of a coherent nuclear model, and the nebulous ‘family values’ later appeals to this model regularly invoked. Instead, as the title of her first chapter, ‘Look Back In Anger’, would seem to suggest, Segal defines the decade as one in which anxieties and ambiguities surrounding masculinity and fatherhood were pushed to the forefront of discourses on the family. Once again, the central site in which these anxieties about the masculine role, and their place within the family, had to be confronted was within the primary site of the enactment of family life, the domestic sphere. Segal suggests that the focus on family and the home that we observe in the American ideal of the postwar family was, indeed, replicated on this side of the Atlantic:

“Men...in popular consciousness, were being domesticated. They had returned from battlefield to bungalow with new expectations of the comforts and pleasures of home. Both the popular and academic writing of the fifties celebrate a new ‘togetherness’, domestic harmony and equality between the sexes. The sociological writing of the fifties, for example, applauds the profound changes underway in family life.” (Segal, 1990, p.3)

Here Segal’s analysis seems to support our earlier analysis of the wider discourse on the family during the period. Both in Britain and America it was obvious to many theorists that the return of countless men to family life in the postwar context, and the accompanying baby boom that this circumstance entailed, was proving to be something of a discursive ‘year zero’ for certain notions of family life that continue to retain their dominance to this day. This would explain why so many studies of the family, and particularly of men’s place within it, including Segal’s, begin their analysis after the significant historical rupture of World War II. As suggested earlier,

however, this approach risks enshrining a totalising notion of fatherhood pre-1945 as almost entirely removed from the process of parenting when, as John Tosh's work informed us, this domestication of masculinity would certainly not have been anathema to the Victorians, or in any number of social and historical contexts. In fact, Segal's analysis of the broadly critical nature of many of the discourses surrounding fatherhood in the 1950s suggests that the decade was one in which the dominance of the male within the context of the family was regularly challenged, rather than simply being reinforced by countless attempts to represent an image of domestic masculinity. Once again, it is possible to read the discursive explosion of texts espousing the nuclear family model and the return of a domesticated notion of masculinity as opening up the possibility for critique of that same model.

The increased professionalisation of advice on the family would also seem to play a role here. Segal suggests that one of the key forms that the explosion of professional and popular discourse on parenting took was a strong emphasis on the importance of the mother, and the consequent absence of the father:

“In accordance with expert opinion, the deluge of childcare manuals of the fifties either completely ignored the father's role in parenting, or treated the idea of paternal participation as a joke. *From Here To Maternity*, for example, restricts itself to warning husbands of the bizarre ‘monkey business’ they will have to tolerate from their pregnant wives” (Segal, 1990, p.11)

An increase in the number of childcare manuals addressing the subject of parenting provides a reasonably transparent example of both the way in which the 1950s foregrounded the discussion of parenthood and some of the key trends that grew out of this discussion. The absence of fatherhood from many of these texts places the full responsibility for parenting onto the mother and the consequent regulatory impulse that this implies has, quite rightly, been identified by many feminist commentators as

yet another factor that shapes notions of femininity as primarily domestic. While these regulatory discourses undoubtedly exhibit discursive power (one need only look at the massive success of childcare guru Dr Spock to see that people were eager for advice), it is also possible to read them as contributing to an increasing 'denaturalisation' of the processes of parenting. While the maternal is privileged in these discourses, and the father mostly absent, on a meta-discursive level both parents have been asked to cede responsibility to a panel of experts. While the 'naturalness' of motherhood is seemingly reinforced through its prominent position within these texts, in actual fact, the process is intrinsically denaturalised by the implication that it can be taught in books. Once again, while discourses on the family in this historical context place the nuclear model, with a highly gendered parental division of labour at its core, in a position of discursive dominance, the overarching effect suggests that seemingly regulatory aspects of this discourse are possibly undermined by increased scrutiny of the nuclear model. After all, if a 'correct' ideal of parenting can be constructed through the use of the relevant manuals, does that not open up the possibility of constructing alternative forms of parenting, once the 'naturalness' of a single model has been compromised by an acknowledgement of its learnt nature?

The contradiction between the increased domestication of masculinity Segal identifies in the sociological discourses on the family during the period and the absence of fatherhood from the popular discourse on parenting demonstrates the ambiguities that surrounded the role of the father. While, on one level, father was being welcomed back from the war with open arms, on another, he was being excluded from certain accompanying domestic activities in a way that would have been hugely unfamiliar as recently as the Victorian era. The central, nuclear model of the family, with its separation of work and home life, accounts for this in part. With

the responsibility for economic provision strongly defined as male, aspiring fathers must remove themselves from the domestic sphere in order to fully assume the role as commonly defined in the nuclear model. Equally, women must primarily remain within the domestic sphere in order to fulfil the commonly defined role of the mother. The fragility of this model is exposed, however, by a comparison between the domestication of masculinity in the Victorian era, as identified by John Tosh (1999), and the later increased domestication of masculinity in the postwar context, as identified by Segal (1996). The logical conclusion that can be drawn from an acknowledgement of these two separate moments of domestication is that there was a brief window, falling somewhere between the end of the 19th and the middle of the 20th centuries, in which masculinity and fatherhood were all but removed from the domestic sphere altogether. Two major global conflicts would have certainly played a significant part in ensuring that this scenario came to pass but the broader culmination of the growth of industrial working practices during the 19th century would have also contributed. The combination of men absenting themselves from the domestic sphere for long periods of time while they went to war, or simply for the daily routine of the factory or office, should perhaps be viewed as a relatively brief rupture in the history of a more integrated, historical notion of domestic masculinity, however, rather than a common model that remains unchanged until the social changes of the second half the 20th century disrupted these 'traditional' family values. By following this line of thought to its logical conclusion the 1950s, arguably the period commonly thought to be the high watermark of the nuclear family's discursive dominance, also represents the period during which this brief window of the rigid separation of masculine and feminine spheres begins to close once more.

To return, then, to the discussion of the representation of fatherhood in the popular culture of this period, it should come as no surprise that many texts presented a far more ambiguous notion of the father's place within the domestic sphere than the 'traditional' suburban, nuclear family as portrayed in *Father Knows Best*. Segal (1996, p.13) points to the 'Angry Young Men' populating such films as *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, as evidence of a youthful discontent with the "dreary grey jobs and marriages awaiting them", if they were to fall in line with the nuclear family model. Equally, Stella Bruzzi suggests that Hollywood's treatment of the figure of the father during the decade demonstrates that, even in the same cultural context that exalted the apparent stability of the nuclear family in *Father Knows Best*, a greater discursive complexity could be observed:

"The 1950s offered an ambivalent image of the father. A yearning for the strong authoritarian patriarch synchronous with the Freudian model was manifested in the films of the 1950s as a fascination with the domineering father who is frequently out of control. Alongside this father resided the paternal image most readily associated with the 1950s – the nine-to-five 'man in the grey flannel suit'" (Bruzzi, 2005, p.38)

Moving beyond the cliché of representations of the 1950s family as a blandly homogenous homage to the nuclear model, then, there is an apparent tension evident in many texts focusing on the family at this historical juncture. Once again, we must question the naive assumption of a singular representation being consistently reproduced in order to impose a regulatory discourse of the family throughout the era. Instead we must acknowledge the fact that these texts contributed to a wider public debate on the nature of the family, which, by its very nature, altered the way in which family life was perceived.

On British television, from which the economic impetus to present a potentially idealised version of reality in order to attract advertisers was largely

removed, the image of family life was quite different from that presented in *Father Knows Best*. In situation comedy, for example, where the American model of mass-audience sitcom was shaped around the patriarchal family, the key models that its British counterparts provided presented a very different image of fatherhood and masculinity in general. Ray Galton and Alan Simpson were perhaps the two writers most responsible for defining the key aspects of the genre. They began their television careers with Tony Hancock, transferring his highly successful radio show to television in 1954. As Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik (2000, p.279) point out, the show

“...deviated from the bourgeois family norm of domestic sit-com. ‘Hancock’ was an ‘outsider’: a ‘belligerent, pompous, frequently childish and petulant’, middle-aged bachelor who was not only forever seeking to better himself but believed at the same time that he was already superior.

As this description makes clear, a character clearly without any trace of the ‘intelligence’ attributed to Jim Anderson in *Father Knows Best*, the bulk of the comedy in *Hancock* (1961) comes from undermining rather than reaffirming Hancock’s imagined superiority. Galton and Simpson’s next successful project, the long-running *Steptoe and Son* (1962-74), throws this comparison into even sharper relief:

“In *Steptoe* there is a marked non-correspondence between its *situational* ‘normality’- the stable situation to which each episode returns- and the bourgeois-familial ‘normality’ which is the ideological touchstone of the traditional domestic sitcom. In fact, in its lack of regular female characters, its emphatic squalor, and its verbal and physical crudity (and sometime cruelty), *Steptoe and Son* is the *inverse* of such shows...The key to its notable success seems to be the way in which it represents a *spectacle* of inverted bourgeois decorum for a bourgeois audience: one has to know the ‘rules’ in order to recognise and to find the ways in which they are broken funny”

(Neale and Krutnik, 2000, p.281).

Based around the troubled relationship between a father and son, as they struggle to run a small ‘rag and bone’ business from their home, the bulk of the comedy in

Steptoe and Son is derived from the antagonistic relationship between the mean-spirited, devious, stubborn and foul-mouthed father, Albert/Wilfred Brambell, and the frustrated idealism of his son, Harold/Harry H. Corbett. “The plot of most episodes tend to centre upon an attempt by Harold to escape from his frustrating circumstances...and his inevitable failure to do so.” (Neale and Krutnik, 2000, p.281).

The very fact that the situation portrayed in *Steptoe and Son* differs from the ‘normal’ family set-up of the domestic sitcom, demonstrates the fact that, in Britain at least, the comfy coherence of the nuclear model potentially never held the same level of cultural dominance with which it is retroactively imbued today. Instead, *Steptoe and Son* dramatises a generational struggle that would arguably become more and more relevant as the dominant ideologies of the 1950s gave way to the significant social change of the 1960s. Harold is portrayed as trapped by his relationship with an abusive and uncaring father, who is more of an emotional and economic burden than patriarch or provider. Unlike the idealised domestic situation portrayed in *Father Knows Best*, *Steptoe and Son*’s deliberate exclusion of the feminine ensures that their home remains shabby and uncared for, while Harold’s numerous attempts to make a romantic alliance are thwarted by his father, seemingly scared that he will be neglected if his son were to ever find a wife.

In the British context, it would seem that the many of the most popular sitcoms derive their comedy from the frustrated, bourgeois aspirations of the main characters¹ rather than from placing bourgeois norms under mild threat, before their eventual restatement at the end of the show, as in ‘traditional’ domestic sitcoms such as *Father Knows Best*. As already noted, the existence of a strong tradition of public

¹ The huge success of *Only Fools and Horses* during the 1980s, based around a similarly all male family of ‘wheeler dealers’ in South London, and finding comedy in the constant failure of their attempts to become millionaires, suggests the enduring nature of the model provided by *Steptoe and Son*.

service broadcasting may have played a part in this, freeing writers from the burden of presenting a show the overarching ideology of which reflects well on potential sponsors. Equally, the difference between the economic situations of the UK and the US immediately following the war may have played their part. The consumer boom experienced in America was necessarily tempered in the UK by the economic drain of paying for, and rebuilding after, an extended conflict. The common logic is that Britain's global influence also began to wane after World War II, with the British Empire continuing to shrink from its height during the Victorian era and American influence growing steadily. In this context, it is possible to read *Steptoe and Son* as a dramatisation of many of the issues facing postwar Britain. When Harold's pomposity is pricked, just as Hancock's was before him, it reflects a very British obsession with class, and with those who aspire to social mobility. Equally, it is possible to see Harold as held back by his father, who could be said to represent a growing mistrust of seemingly outmoded traditions. As Neale and Krunik (2000, p.286) suggest, "What are at stake, then, in the 'serious' dramatic core of *Steptoe and Son* are familial obligation and allegiance in relation to the needs and desires of the individual".

It is no coincidence that these tensions are played out through the relationship between father and son, rather than, say, mother and daughter. While Albert continues to exert a form of patriarchal control over Harold, the endless misery that this causes his son demonstrates that the programme does not consider this position of power an inevitable nor desirable state of affairs. Unlike *Father Knows Best*, in which threats to the 'natural' order of nuclear family life are neutralised, often through the intervention of patriarchal power, in *Steptoe and Son*, the influence that Albert exerts on his son is shown to be the key factor which stifles the fulfilment of his potential. Unlike the US sitcom, in which the stability of the nuclear family is literally equated with the

economic well-being of the country as a whole, the British sitcom presents a more complex analysis of the way in which traditional familial bonds may well interfere with the individualistic emphasis of a capitalist, consumer-led culture.

Contrasting these two seemingly disparate examples of the same genre from the same period does demonstrate that familial relationships have long formed the basis of much situation comedy, alongside other incredibly popular television genres, as they continue to do today. More than that, however, our comparison also demonstrates that, far from presenting a single, coherent model of patriarchal, nuclear family life, many programmes from the era actually made room for the tensions, ambiguities and complexities that an increased discursive focus on the family in a variety of different discourses had inspired. While *Steptoe and Son* may address this tension in a more literal fashion it could, and has, been argued that the show's comedic impulse to some degree intrinsically reinstates a norm of bourgeois family life through its, sometimes vicious, mockery of Harold and Albert's alternative situation. As Neale and Krutnik suggest, *Steptoe and Son* offers the "comedic inverse" of this norm, deriving its humour from the acknowledgement of its transgression. While this argument certainly has merit it also potentially simplifies the various levels of humour functioning throughout the programme. A certain portion of the audience may well have found humour in their identification with the characters' situation; either with the literal frustrations of their inability to transcend their own situation, or with the more figurative notion of an individualistic idealism stifled by tradition, represented here by a domineering father. While a certain kind of stability is restored at the end of each episode, as is the nature of sitcom, the fact that the characters return to their slightly desperate situation, and the pathos with which this is often handled, suggests that the dramatic and comedic thrust of the programme is not simply based

upon a potentially carnivalesque inversion of societal norms, but is also based, at least partially, in an acknowledgement of the real complexities and issues surrounding family life. This common, identifiable trait of both an appeal to realism and a willingness to confront the downbeat, mundane aspects of life has run through much of British television ever since. From the mean-spirited, casually racist Alf Garnett/Warren Mitchell in *Till Death Us Do Part* (1965-75) to the straight-talking residents of *Coronation Street* (1960-), both of which flourished in the gap between the 'conformist' 50s and the 'swinging' 60s, British television has long shunned the aspirational model favoured across the Atlantic for a more complex account of family life, proving that many discourses of the family originating in the 1950s were far from the slavish restatements of the nuclear model that we may imagine dominated the decade. As the success of *Steptoe and Son* shows, from its earliest inception, mass-audience television in the Britain was unafraid to enter into the debate about the complexities of family life, rather than simply attempting to impose a single discourse.

But what of *Father Knows Best*? Is it sensible, or even possible, to draw such a dramatic distinction between the apparent complexity of British discourses of the family during the period and the notion of a monolithic, nuclear family-dominated television discourse in the US? To do so would require us to both fall back on the notion that the 1950s provides us with the last historical period of discursive and demographic coherence in notions of the family, and to ignore the comedic intent of the programme. While Neale and Krutnik argued that *Steptoe and Son* derived its humour from the disparity between the character's situation and bourgeois 'normality', the use of pathos in the show does not simply dismiss this disparity as comedic transgression. Equally, while the 'Betty: Girl Engineer' episode of *Father*

Knows Best clearly derives humour from the disparity between Betty's aspirations and the gender norms that the show reinstates at the end, the content of the episode literally dramatises the wider debate about the place of women within the workforce. The 'natural' order may well be restored at the end of the episode, and father may indeed still "know best", but the very fact that such an ideological conflict forms the basis for the episode demonstrates that *Father Knows Best* is exemplary of the contemporary debates that surrounded the ideal of the nuclear, patriarchal family. Far from being the last point at which there was a universal consensus on the formation and gender dynamics of the 'normal' family, therefore, the 1950s and early 1960s, in fact, represent the point at which a critical discussion of the concept, across a range of discourses, became mainstream.

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Old Men, New Families: The rhetoric of crisis and the post-familial family.

While families in the 1950s may have been both discursively and demographically more varied than the common, homogenous image of the decade as the high-watermark of the nuclear model implied, the decade has played a key role in both popular and academic discourses of the family. While attempting to sidestep this reductive implication of discursive coherence is important, it is also essential to note that the decade's position in relation to the historical rupture of World War II does mark it out as a key moment at which the discourse of the family flourished, leading to a greater willingness to debate concepts central to the family's construction at the same time as broadly purporting the 'correctness' of a singular model. Our analysis of both *Father Knows Best* and *Stepfather and Son* demonstrated that certain ambiguities and anxieties surrounding the family were played out through the characters and

situations that the show covered. Instead of offering the last example of a coherent, uninterrogated notion of family life, the texts of this era in fact placed family life under as much scrutiny as this essential aspect of human experience had always been, if not a higher degree than ever before. This, combined with the explosion of popular media throughout the decade (most notably the rise of television) ensured that not only did the family find a key position within this explosion of popular culture but also that popular culture images of family fed back into the wider discourse. In essence, the 1950s are not necessarily important for offering a final moment at which 'traditional' family values held sway in reality, but they are important for placing the family at the forefront of postwar popular culture and starting a discussion of family life that has proven to be central to popular culture, particularly in the case of television, ever since.

From the 1960s onwards the legacy of this increased discursive interest in the family led to an ever-increasing complexity in the representations of family life that were presented by popular television. Broadly coherent models, such as the nuclear family of *Father Knows Best*, with its clumsy and obvious attempts to impose a singular ideology onto their characters, swiftly began to look like dated attempts to reinforce a model that was already significantly threatened by broader social changes, such as the increasing influence of feminism and the women's movement:

"As statistics increasingly showed that the nuclear family was in a minority of household grouping, television sitcoms on both sides of the Atlantic showed families of many different kinds, often less than perfect: the British *Till Death Do Us Part* (1966-75) and its American spin-off *All In The Family* (1971-9), with their bigoted husbands, Alf Garnett and Archie Bunker; *Steptoe and Son* in their non-ideal home behind the scrapyard (1962-6 and 1970-4); the grotesque *Addams Family* (1964-6) and *The Munsters* (1964-5), and the all-male, yet innocent, *Odd Couple* (1970-5). There were sitcoms about black families (Cosby), ghetto families, and all kinds of deviant families, reflecting real life itself. (Briggs, 209)

As the above list of programmes suggests, the years following the development of the television family since the explosion of the medium's popularity in the 1950s have seen an ever-increasing plurality in the kinds of families depicted on the small screen, as programmes tried to reflect the plurality of its audience's lived experiences. And yet, the nuclear family remains central to much television programming to this day, either through continued representation of the model, or by offering a position of 'normality' against which many alternative representations have been judged. Both of these positions continue to offer critique of the nuclear model however, either through the complex dynamics of conflict and humour that create narrative interest, or by making a virtue of alternative configurations. As the nuclear family assumes a broadly patriarchal structure, yet codes the domestic realm (primary sphere of its enactment) as feminine, it is often across the figure of the father, either present or absent, that these tensions are played out.

By the 1970s, for example, increasing concern about the erosion of the 'traditional' family unit, seemingly brought about by rising divorce rates and the greater number of women entering the workplace, meant that debates about the future of 'family values' regularly found their way onto the small screen. In the US particularly, many shows, particularly in the family-dominated genre of situation comedy, quite openly entered wider national debates about the changes on family life:

"In the 1970s...public attention was focused on changes in family structure, in particular on domestic distress. The television family in this period echoed these concerns.... The vast majority of series with domestic settings offered viewers troubled or fractured or reconstituted families. These domestic dramas reflected the anxiety about the erosion of domestic life that was beginning to punctuate the rhetoric of politicians and policymakers, social scientists and therapists." (Taylor, 1989, p.65)

All In The Family (1971-79), for example, is often cited as a key text that took the family sitcom model of *Father Knows Best* and, like its British source material *Till Death Us Do Part*, derived comedy from the lack of harmony in the Bunker household. The make-up of the Bunker household may indeed mirror the nuclear family, but the ways in which it differs demonstrated the programme's intent to accommodate a more nuanced notion of family life. Archie Bunker/Carroll O'Connor, a bigoted, working class World War II veteran, lives with his sweet natured, if slightly naive wife, Edith/Jean Stapleton. They have one daughter, Gloria/Sally Struthers, who is married to a sociology student named, Michael/Rob Reiner. Here we can see that the generational and gendered dynamic of the nuclear model, with both genders represented within each generation, remains the model for the Bunker family. The programme complicates this traditional model, however, by replacing the expected son and daughter with a young married couple. The fact that economic reasons force them to live with Archie and Edith for much of the series also allows the programme to address the significantly different economic situation in which each of the couples has begun their life together. While the framework of the nuclear family may well remain in place the show also offers a scenario in which two couples, from successive generations, are forced to cohabit. This often leads to a scenario in which two potential patriarchs are in competition, with Michael's role as the unit's 'son' figure complicated by his apparent inability to provide for his wife and adopt the role of patriarch within his own family unit.

It is this conflict between two opposing notions of masculinity that perhaps explains why the programme has assumed such prominence in debates about the shifting representation of family life on American television. While the programme is broadly critical of Archie's outmoded bigotry and constant undermining of his son-in-

law, whose relationship with Gloria offers a more egalitarian model of marriage, Ella Taylor argues that the tone of the show exposes a greater ambiguity that suggests that its core values could not be said to align completely with the modern ideals represented by the character of Michael:

“This family has become a stage for the dramatization of conflict.... Beyond this grows a pervasive unease about the survival of the family itself and its relationship to an outside world increasingly experienced as threatening rather than benign- simultaneously remote and incursive.” (Taylor, 1989, p.74)

While Taylor’s characterisation of the show does not preclude the suggestion that the humour is primarily derived from the disparity between the outmoded model of patriarchy provided by Archie, and a new, egalitarian model offered by Michael, her identification of a “pervasive unease” also warns us against unduly limiting the ideological position the show adopts. While both Archie, and the views that he espouses, are regularly mocked, he continues to provide the central figure throughout most episodes. By dramatising the threat to previously coherent models of family life primarily through the figure of the father, Archie comes to embody this discursive tension, simultaneously offering an exaggerated model of outmoded patriarchy ripe for mockery and a continuing rebuttal to this threat of social change through his stubborn refusal to adjust.

Josh Ozserksy reiterates both the way in which the character of Archie shoulders the weight of this discursive tension, and paradoxical discursive weight that this affords his viewpoint by focusing on his narrative centrality:

“Archie is a creature of the past, lingering into the present as an unquiet spirit, a ghost who has outlived the era that created him....Mike and Gloria know it. Even Edith, for all her servility, knows it. The only one who doesn’t know it is Archie, and it is this very indomitability of the character...that elevates him above traditional TV heavies and bigots. They “learn their lesson” at the end of every episode. That Archie *never* learns his lesson is the source of his great iconic power.” (Ozersky, 2003, p.66)

That the “iconic power” that Ozersky identifies is a direct result of Archie’s seemingly negative inability to learn demonstrates the way in which his character is forced to embody both sides of an ongoing debate about family life. Humour is derived from the disparity between Archie’s assumption of the rightfulness of his patriarchal power and the more positive way in which the other characters are represented. The “indomitability” of his spirit and its centrality to the narrative, however, imbue him with an iconic power that ensures that it is his character that dominates the programme.

Alongside this iconic power derived from his centrality to the narrative, Archie also offers a point of identification for those who might relate to his feeling of being disenfranchised by social change. Ozersky identifies this as a key factor in the huge success of the show:

“This cultural power of Archie went a long way toward earning the show its fabulously wide audience (by the 1974-1975 season, an *average* episode was viewed by a fifth of the total population). But the real key was that the older, put-upon Americans whom Archie represented enjoyed him far more than they might have been expected to, given his full-time status as butt and buffoon....For all Archie’s malapropism, Lear gave his antihero sentiments that were extremely potent at the time.” (Ozerky, 2003, p.67)

As Ozersky’s argument reminds us, Archie’s embodiment of tensions in a broader debate on family life necessarily forces him to express both sides. While the programme makes apparent its disagreement with the reactionary viewpoints that the character expresses through consistent mockery, his narrative dominance and the relative cultural power with which this imbues him offer a counterargument to this process that it was possible for a certain section of the audience to enjoy unironically. If, as Ella Taylor suggests, *All in the Family* demonstrates the way in which “the family has become a stage for the dramatisation of conflict” (1989, p.74), with the

very survival of the nuclear, patriarchal model at stake, then Archie is the battleground over which this conflict is fought. While his position as the butt of the show's humour may well attempt to place the audience in opposition to this outmoded model, the cultural weight and unchanging nature of the character offers a coherent position from which this opposition may itself be opposed. As his surname implies, Archie Bunker also offers an entrenched position from which threats to this previously coherent model may be resisted. As the tension at the heart of the show demonstrates, if the conflict that he embodies were to ever find resolution then the humour would disappear and the show would become ultimately pointless.

One of the key tensions apparent in both *All in the Family* and its British counterpart, *Till Death Do Us Part*, is the threat of the Other to the maintenance of white masculinity as a marker of universal personhood. Both Archie Bunker and Alf Garnett adopt racist language and opinions that, by the 1970s, it would have been all but impossible to put into the mouth of a character that was anything but the butt of the joke. The motivation behind the inclusion of a racial element in these shows is not just the creation of humour, however. Just as the egalitarian marriage of each of these patriarch's daughters threatens to dismantle their assumed domestic authority, the perceived threat to his economic and cultural dominance in an increasingly multi-cultural society is included through their open hostility to other races. Once again, this assumed dominance is demonstrably misguided, the assumption being that their racism is inherently humorous. In their position as embodiment of this tension between an outmoded form of dominant, patriarchal masculinity and a more egalitarian model of social and racial influence both Archie and Alf still make room for the other side of the argument. The "potent sentiments" that Ozsersky identifies as appealing to a broad section of *All in the Family*'s huge audience are not simply those

surrounding the changing nature of the nuclear family and the tensions that this process inspires. They also reflect a broader discourse surrounding the diminishing power of the white, working class male within the economic sphere. While Archie and Alf's reactionary posture in relation to these threats to their social and cultural dominance, either from women or other ethnicities, is shown to be ridiculous through the use of humour, their position as the anti-hero in their respective shows complicates this. By embodying a moment of flux in multiple shifting discourses, the figure of the father potentially becomes the ground upon which battles for discursive power are fought. By offering succour to both sides, however, through an acknowledgement of their ludicrousness or through a continued restatement of their reactionary views, these characters demonstrate the centrality of fatherhood to a ongoing moment of discursive change, rather than indicating the conclusion of one model and its replacement by another.

Alongside this dramatisation of the tensions in the changing discourse of family life, another trend toward nostalgia for previous moments of discursive coherence is also observable. Hour-long dramas, such as *Little House on the Prairie* (1974-82), looked as far back as the 19th century to validate their representation of a cosily patriarchal domestic scenario, untroubled by women's liberation or the civil rights struggle. Sitcom, however, responded by casting back to an imagined 1950s in the hugely successful *Happy Days* (1974-1984). Even in the nuclear family dominated 1950s that *Happy Days* makes appeal to, however, the difficulty of providing a coherent representation of this particular model is still apparent. Most of the episodes ostensibly centre on the Cunningham family, who offer an almost disturbingly literal iteration of the minimal nuclear model consisting of father, mother, one male and one female child (with a third child written out as early as Season 2 so as not to disturb

this pleasing symmetry). In reality, however, much of the action centres on teenage son Ritchie/Ron Howard and his group of friends, not least local 'bad boy' Arthur 'The Fonz' Fonzarelli/Henry Winkler, who proved so popular with viewers that he was eventually moved in with the family to increase his potential screen time. Joanne Morreale comments on the importance of this shift in focus on the eventual success of the show:

"In response to FCC pressure, the networks decided at the end of 1974 to dedicate a 'family' hour from eight to nine o'clock each evening. Few popular programs resulted, and the idea was abandoned in May 1976. But ABC did achieve ratings success with family hour shows such as *Happy Days* (1974-1984)...which portrayed a nostalgic, essentially white view of 1950s America. Yet, *Happy Days* became a hit only after it altered its format and showcased 'The Fonz', a prototypical bad boy." (2003, p.153)

Morreale's discussion of the genesis and development of *Happy Days* demonstrates the continuing centrality of a broader discourse surrounding family change on television's representation of the domestic throughout the 1970s, with the 'family hour' showing the concern for the erosion of 'traditional' models of family life. But her indictment of this failed experiment and acknowledgement of the importance of *Happy Days* privileging of other dominant cultural tropes of the 1950s, such as the teenager and rebellion against exactly the sort of conformity the show was conceived to invoke, in achieving its eventual success demonstrate the level to which popular images of the family had moved away from the coherent nuclear model. While Howard Cunningham/Tom Bosley, the head of the Cunningham family, may have continued to represent a popular image of patriarchal masculinity as a husband, father and, as a hardware store owner, both economic provider and expert in that most masculine of pastimes, DIY, it was not he who provided either narrative focus nor became the breakout star. Instead most episodes centred around the variations of teenage masculinity provided by Ritchie Cunningham and his alternative family of

school friends, while it turned out to be The Fonz, embodiment of a rebellious, sexually-promiscuous, ethnic masculinity, that proved most popular with audiences.

As in the broader discourse on fatherhood the dynamic between absence and presence is readily apparent throughout sitcom representations of fatherhood during this period of discursive change. Continued appeals to a coherent model of patriarchal masculinity required both situation in a possibly imagined historical moment of social and cultural dominance and integration into a broader narrative that did not require them to remain centre stage. Where there were attempts to integrate masculinity into the domestic sphere, however, the father became a point of tension, driving the comedic narrative through embodying the tension between discursive change and stasis.

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Alternative Families: Re-Modelling Race and Gender in the 1980s

By the time many of the contested representations of family life that characterised domestic sitcom throughout the 1970s were entering their final moments, their waning relevance for audiences suggested that the tensions they had dramatised had at least partially been resolved. As identified in our analysis of the continuing focus on the fatherhood and family in theory proves, however, the changing nature of the institution remained on the agenda both in academic and popular discourse. What is apparent is that the traditional nuclear family, dominated by a predominantly white, patriarchal masculinity the erosion of which had provided the central narrative tension for *All in the Family* and *Till Death Us Do Part*, no longer provided the singular model through which the family was represented.

The incredible success of *The Cosby Show* (1984-1992) throughout the 1980s² has both been heralded as a reinforcement of the politically conservative Reagan-era's espousal of 'traditional' family values and as broadening the possibilities for more varied representations of the family through its positive depiction of an affluent African-American domesticity. While it did arguably reinvigorate the flagging family sitcom genre, re-placing a nuclear model of domesticity at the heart of prime time viewing, it is debateable whether it would have been possible for a show that presented a similarly middle-class ideal of white family life to become such a success, or to have resonated with audiences as widely as *The Cosby Show* obviously did.

Contrasting the characterisation of Archie Bunker as a bigoted buffoon with the more idealised image of fatherhood represented by Cliff Huxtable/Bill Cosby it becomes obvious that the latter character embodies few of the tensions surrounding the role of the father in broader discourse, despite those tensions being apparent across a range of ethnic groups. Michael Real comments on the irony of this in relation to the discursive and demographic prevalence of single-parent and female-dominated households in the African-American community:

“As a result of antifamily practices during slavery and subsequent discriminatory employment practices, black families have had a larger-than-average number of single-parent households with female heads....The Cosby character of Cliff Huxtable, M.D., the loving, caring, and incredibly *present* father of five, is the antithesis to this stereotype. He shares decisions with his wife but is in charge. He shows unwavering understanding, perceptive advice, and good-humored charm in all his dealings with his children. His character is unquestionably established as a well-employed breadwinner, and yet he is present at home and involved with his children to an unusual degree for a working male of any race.” (2003, p.232)

² *The Cosby Show* is one of only three programmes that have held the number one spot in the Nielsen ratings for at least five consecutive seasons (1985-1990). The other two are *American Idol* and, interestingly, *All in the Family*, demonstrating the centrality of the family sitcom to prime time US television.

As Real's description suggests, Huxtable is the ideal of the 'New Father', effortlessly undertaking both the domestic duties of the nurturing parent and the economic duties of the good provider. *The Cosby Show* does not only make pains to represent a more involved model of fatherhood, however, but also demonstrates that this is reliant on a more egalitarian relationship between both parents. Clair Huxtable/Phylicia Rashad is also a high-powered, college educated professional with equal involvement in the lives of her children.

As a conscious attempt to present more positive images of African-American family life on prime-time television *The Cosby Show* could be considered a success. In order to do this, however, it reinstates certain models of patriarchal fatherhood that would threaten to make the program seem unrealistic were the racial element removed. While making pains to acknowledge the increasing economic involvement of women in its depiction of an unashamedly affluent, middle-class domesticity, as Real rightly points out, in the case of the Huxtables the father generally retains ultimate authority. This is reinforced by the deliberate confusion between main character and star, with the programme being named after Cosby himself, and based around his stand up comedy persona, rather than his character name or a reference to family life more generally. The overlap between Cosby and Huxtable continued to blur off-screen, with the release of his best selling book, *Fatherhood*, in 1986. While, as Real suggests, he carefully maintained a "public persona as straightforward and comfortable as they come, Bill Cosby's persona was complex and almost contradictory" (2003, p.228). Despite supporting a range of political causes, regularly visiting the Playboy Mansion and hinting at infidelities in magazine interviews, throughout the 1980s Cosby's portrayal of the ultimate, uncomplicated 'New Father'

made him not just a televisual icon but also personally imbued him with the authority to pronounce on the role across a range of media.

A far cry from the combative, contested model of fatherhood that so appealed to audiences in *All in the Family*, the ensuing success of *The Cosby Show* leads us to question how the resurgence of an apparently uncomplicated model of the nuclear family resonated with audiences familiar with these prior complex representations. Ella Taylor emphasises both the conservative and static nature of the shows presentation of the acceptable moralities of family life:

“...Unlike the Bunkers, for whom every problem became the occasion for an all out war of ideas, the Huxtables never scream or lose control....there is no dissent, no real difference of opinion or belief, only vaguely malicious banter that quickly dissolves into sweet agreement- all part of the busy daily manufacture of consensus.” (1989, p.161)

While there is certainly a conservative impulse present in *The Cosby Show*'s unerringly positive representation of a coherent nuclear family unit, which may well have chimed with the conservative political moment at which it was shown, it is also the acknowledgement of difference from previous models that made it so successful and that makes it so commented upon today. While Taylor may see *The Cosby Show* as threatening “to quash the quarrelsome liveliness of the shows of the 1970s and the healthy diversity of 1980s television families by burying their heads in the nostalgic sands of ‘traditional values’ that never were” (1989, p.167), it is possible to argue that this argument underplays the radical differences between the Huxtables and previous models of the nuclear family, such as the Andersons in *Father Knows Best*.

An increasing acknowledgement of the involvement of women within the economic sphere is readily embraced in *The Cosby Show*. While the character of Cliff Huxtable, and the off-screen persona of Cosby himself, may ultimately validate his

patriarchal authority, Clair Huxtable also presents a broadly positive image of working motherhood. Through audience reception study, Lynn Spigel argues that, for the female viewers she interviewed, it was this image of femininity removed from its racial context which proved to be the show's most resonant message: "Having grown up on *Cosby*, many of these women (almost all of whom were white) saw her as the ultimate woman who had combined a successful law career with a loving family life" (Spigel, 2001a, p.373). Spigel goes on to question this disassociation of race and gender issues by positing two alternative reasons for this response:

"We might interpret the student's identification with Clair as a sign of hope: that is, the presence of more black female characters on television helps break down racism by creating lines of identification between races. Or, we may interpret their responses as a measure of success for the much-criticized *Cosby* strategy: that is *Cosby's* attempt to elide race and class issues in favour of presenting ideal role models". (Spigel, 2001a, p.73)

Spigel's acknowledgement of the show's "much-criticized" strategy of presenting idealised images of nuclear family life in order to present positive images of African-Americans on prime-time television alerts us to the different motivations between this and previous modes of representation, both positive and negative. In attempting to create positive images of African-American life, despite the necessity of sacrificing certain elements of realism, *The Cosby Show* is perhaps the closest that a prime time television programme has come to *deliberately* attempting to present an idealised image of family life for ideological ends. The Andersons of *Father Knows Best* both acknowledged and neutralised threats to the white, middle-class nuclear family through conflict resolution and a return to the status quo, while the Bunkers of *All in the Family* dramatised these threats through constant tension. The *Cosby's*, alternatively, avoid this dramatisation of tension wherever possible by representing the broadly harmonious domestic and economic lives of their main characters, with

the comedy deriving from the gentle disruption of these through their children's challenges to, and the ultimate reinstatement of, parental authority.

This displacement of narrative tension away from the outdated nature of patriarchal authority and onto the adolescent naivety of the teenage children is only possible, however, through the Cosby family's difference from those models of nuclear domesticity that preceded it. By representing Clair, as well as Cliff, as both nurturer and provider *The Cosby Show* nullifies the tension between spouses brought about by the assumption of separate spheres of experience, creating a cohesive parental unit and displacing what tension there is onto the differences between generations rather than genders. Instead of the model of buffoon-like fatherhood, acknowledged as misguided by both the audience and the family members that surround him, as in the case of Archie Bunker, *The Cosby Show* supports its representation of parental authority by allowing father and mother to support each other in both their domestic and economic duties.

Alongside the programme's more equitable treatment of women, the much commented upon issue of race also influences its ability to represent a modified image of the 'traditional' nuclear family to a broad audience. *The Cosby Show* represents a deliberate attempt to present more positive images of African-American family life on prime time television, even if the resulting model of domestic harmony overlooks certain social and economic factors that affect the lived experience of African-American families. While this approach can be read, as Ella Taylor's analysis tends towards, as reinforcing broader stereotypes of the 'traditional' nuclear family, in line with the socially conservative ideology of Reagan-era America, by focusing on an African-American family *The Cosby Show*'s representation of family life is necessarily more complex. Archie Bunker's constantly undermined attempts to

impose his patriarchal authority were based on both a carnivalesque inversion of existing gendered power structures and a dramatisation of shifts within those structures brought about by social change. As a black male, Cosby's traditionally subordinate position within this same representational system partially releases his character from the burden of having to justify his paternal authority within a broader discourse on fatherhood that would seek to question his assumption of dominance within the domestic sphere. Instead of embodying the waning discursive power of white, patriarchal masculinity, Cosby embodies, both in his character on the show and his cultural and economic influence within the industry, the increasing discursive power of alternative forms of racial and gendered identity.

By conflating attempts to mainstream the mythology of the 'New Father' with attempts to broaden the representation of middle-class African-Americans, *The Cosby Show* allows one burgeoning discourse to support the other. While this may also reinstate a model of family life that looks suspiciously nuclear, it would be a mistake to ignore the crucial ways in which it alters the very discourse that it appeals to for validation of these additional models. There are no equally successful attempts to represent a similarly harmonious white nuclear family within the same era. *The Cosby Shows* nearest contemporary, *Family Ties* (1982-89), for example, which garnered high-ratings throughout the same era, chooses to embody the Republican values of the Reagan administration through the Keaton family's teenage son, in opposition to the liberal values of his parents. While the Keatons are as equally nuclear as the Cosbys, the humour comes from the disparity between the children's rejection of their parent's values. As such, *Family Ties* arguably offers an inverse of *All in the Family*, in which the liberal values of the 1960s counterculture are mocked as outmoded just as Archie's conservative values are the subject of mockery in the earlier show. What is

revealing is that, in the context of a representation of a white, nuclear family the parental generation continues to embody opposition to the prevailing discourse.

While *The Cosby Show* continues to offer something similar to the conservative model of nuclear family life appropriate to the political climate in which it became a success, it only achieves this through broadening the model to include more egalitarian notions of domestic and economic responsibilities, in terms of gender. By framing this within a previously unavailable representation of the African-American family, the show ultimately creates a new ideal of family life partially freed from the discursive weight of previous representations that had questioned the level of patriarchal authority exhibited by Cosby. As *Family Ties* demonstrated, this pre-existing discourse is still present in the representation of the white nuclear family, with the parents continuing to embody outmoded ideas and the younger generation continuing to embody current thinking, whichever of these could be considered liberal or conservative.

Criticisms of the unrealistic nature of the Huxtable family demonstrate this dynamic. It is only within the deliberately idealised model of family life represented in *The Cosby Show* that the egalitarian model of the 'New Father' is validated, and this is only possible through Cliff Huxtable's simultaneous positioning within alternative discourses of racially diverse fatherhood partially freed from the associations of cultural and social power with which white, patriarchal masculinity is inevitably imbued. In *Family Ties*, the egalitarian values of Steven Keaton/Michael Gross, which arguably also qualify him as a 'New Father', imbue him with little or no power over his conservative children, continuing the previous trend of allowing the father to embody the waning influence of previous cultural ideals. What the success of both these shows demonstrated, therefore, is not a simple restatement of 'traditional'

values through a representation of nuclear family life, but a continuation of the dramatisation of debates surrounding the effect of broader social changes on this model which had provided both the tension and humour in earlier sitcoms.

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Representing the Post-Familial Family in the 1990s and Beyond

As the plurality of preceding family types presented on mainstream television suggests, rather than reinstating an ideal of the patriarchal, nuclear model as the norm of family life, the level of deviation from this model that allowed *The Cosby Show* to be successful became its more enduring legacy.

In the US, the hugely successful *Roseanne* saw a female stand-up adopting Cosby's technique of building a show around a previous comedic routine, with an equally blurred line between her on-screen and off-screen persona. Unlike *The Cosby Show*, however, which adopted an idealised image of nuclear family life in order to present positive images of African-Americans, *Roseanne* (1988-97) confronted idealised notions of the white, nuclear family by inverting them for comedic effect. By focusing on a believable working-class family, in which economic difficulties were the ever-present responsibility of both genders, the show was a "deliberate attempt to show the underside of the harmonious nuclear family portrayed in typical domestic sitcoms" (Morreale, 2003, p.247). The various ways in which *Roseanne* challenges the assumptions underpinning a harmonious notion of the nuclear family, and the show's success with an audience hungry for more realistic representations of their own lives, demonstrates just how far the idealised image of the nuclear family had become untenable.

Most apparently, the struggle over the maintenance of domestic power that had characterised Archie Bunker's dealings with his relatives has been resolved in the woman's favour. Roseanne/Roseanne Barr is clearly the head of the Connor household, as surely as her eponymous nature and her dominant role in the show's production ensure that she maintains control over the images of domestic motherhood that she chooses to display. Unlike Cosby, who created a model of idealised black domestic masculinity that served to bolster his paternal authority, Roseanne dominates the show, and by extension the Connor family, by presenting the inverse of an idealised image of motherhood. It is the ways in which Roseanne differs from the traditional television housewife that create the comedy and are thus placed centre stage in the narrative. Kathleen K. Rowe characterises *Roseanne*'s inversion of these previous models as placing her within the category of "unruly woman":

"The unruly woman is multivalent, her social power is unclear. She has reinforced traditional structures....But she has also helped sanction political disobedience for men and women alike by making such disobedience thinkable. She can signify the radical utopianism of undoing all hierarchy. She can also signify pollution". (Rowe, 2002, p.252)

Roseanne's willingness, both as character and star, to challenge idealised notions of femininity through openly embracing discussion of her weight, her personal hygiene habits and her abilities as a mother, and making this discussion a subject for comedy, offer precisely such an 'undoing' of accepted hierarchies of motherhood. In so doing she not only embodies an increasing plurality of ways in which both femininity and motherhood may be understood, but also addresses the intrinsic assumption about economics and class that had shaped previous models.

The reshaping of motherhood undertaken through the character of Roseanne is not just a product of her unwillingness to accept the mantle of 'domestic goddess' but

also of her inability to do so. The succession of menial jobs that Roseanne undertakes throughout the show's nine seasons necessarily complicate her ability to adopt the role of nurturing mother, by partially removing her from the domestic sphere, or to fully adopt the role of provider, by virtue of their unstable and low paying nature. Once again *Roseanne* offers the inverse of *The Cosby Show*, but performs the same function of broadening out possible representations of the family. The dual income household in *The Cosby Show* is a force for both economic stability and personal fulfilment, with both parents performing well-paid, professional jobs that offer financial security and intellectual stimulation, while the demands upon their time that these roles would entail in reality are rarely referenced as problematic. In *Roseanne*, the dual income household is a grim necessity, with both parents working insecure jobs that offer neither ultimate financial security nor personal fulfilment. While this offers a more realistic depiction of domestic life, as lived by many families, the tensions that can occur as a result are also a source of comedy. Roseanne is often tired and impatient with both her husband and her children, while the loving relationships that they so obviously share are no barrier to each of the characters feeling trapped by their various situations. In this sense, *Roseanne*'s desire to depict the real challenges of working class family life and the contradictions between this and the dominant mythology of the nuclear family, as embodied through Roseanne's 'unruliness', demonstrates the "radical utopianism of undoing all hierarchy", opening up a space in which different models of family life can be thought and displayed. The humorous intention of the show, and the fact that Roseanne, and the Connors as a whole, are, to some extent, able to be laughed *at* as well as *with*, demonstrates the flipside of Rowe's analysis of the 'unruly woman', highlighting the threat of pollution that she and they pose to the dominant model of nuclear family life.

The imperfection and cynicism that characterise the representation of family life in *Roseanne* were also evident in *Married...With Children* (1987-97), albeit arguably stripped of the emotional core reinforced by most of *Roseanne*'s storylines. Freed from *Roseanne*'s political impetus to present alternative images of femininity, the fact that the show is primarily based around the character of Al Bundy/Ed O'Neill, a nominal patriarch whose consistent underperformance economically and domestically is often attributed to the 'Bundy Curse', allows it to be read as a pastiche of the traditional domestic sitcom. The ultimate unpleasantness of each of the characters, with Al supplemented by his shallow and lazy wife, Peggy/Katey Segal, his cartoonishly unintelligent and sexually promiscuous daughter, Kelly/Christina Applegate, and his socially awkward son, Bud/David Faustino, crudely demonstrate the tension between the 'traditional' model of the harmonious nuclear family and reality of sustaining this model in the face of social and economic challenges.

Despite the parodic excesses of the Bundy family, however, John Fiske suggests that *Married...With Children* expressed a broader truth about the nuclear family. Discussing a comparison between this programme and *The Cosby Show* with a group of undergraduate students he suggests that they:

“...recognized that the difference between *The Cosby Show* and *Married...With Children* reproduced the difference between 'normal' family values and the material conditions of the majority of U.S. families. Consequently, they considered *Married...With Children* to be the most 'realistic' show on television...and used its carnivalesque elements as ways of expressing their sense of the differences between their experience of family life and that proposed for them by the dominant social norms.” (Fiske, 1994, p.118)

What the revealing conclusion of these students demonstrates is not that the Bundy's exactly mirror their experience of family life, but that the cynical nature of model that they portray does depict the gulf between their experience of family life and the

harmonious coherence of the Huxtables in *The Cosby Show*. But to compare *Married...With Children*, which critiques an outmoded ideal of a white, patriarchal model of the nuclear family through the representation of a bumbling, foolish father, with *The Cosby Show*, which depicts a black nuclear family whose patriarchal nature is complicated by the less rigid gendering of the domestic and economic spheres, or even with *Roseanne*, that depicts a similarly blue-collar nuclear family, but one in which the woman ultimately dominates the domestic sphere as well as participating in the economic sphere, is not to compare like with like. *The Cosby Show* does not present a simple restatement of the ideal of the 'traditional' nuclear family, and its departures from this model are equally as important to its project as its similarities. What the exaggerated antagonisms of the Bundys in *Married...With Children* ultimately represent, therefore, is not a 'realistic' portrayal of family life when compared with the 'unrealistic' idealism of *The Cosby Show*, since neither show presents an entirely uncontested image of nuclear family life. Instead the Bundys represent an acknowledgement of the impossibility of representing a harmonious, coherent nuclear family, dominated by a 'traditional' model of white, patriarchal masculinity, to audiences experiencing an increasing plurality in their lived experience of the family.

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The Eternal Child: Juvenile Fatherhood and the Limits of Patriarchy

In the UK, as much as in the US, this trajectory is equally visible, reflecting both similar changes to the discourse of the British family and the influence of these American imports on homegrown productions. *2 Point 4 Children* (1991-99), for example, could be compared to *Roseanne* in its depiction of a working-class, dual-earning family with the majority of narratives centring on the mother rather than the

father. The title makes ironic reference to the ‘average’ nature of the Porter family, referring to the average size of the UK family at the time of the show’s creation in the early 1990s. Alongside elements of surrealism and farce that undermine this allusion to a sense of normality, however, the Porters also demonstrate the shifting dynamics of sitcom families by demonstrating the decreasingly gendered nature of the economic sphere, with both the father and the mother accepting the burden of economic provision. That both characters share equally masculine names (the mother is called Bill/Belinda Lang while the father is called Ben/Gary Olsen) also draws attention to the blurring of traditional gender roles within the Porter household.

Instead of the antagonistic relationships that defined Archie Bunker and Al Bundy, however, Ben Porter’s place within the narrative of family life demonstrates a slightly gentler solution to the problem of reintegrating masculinity into the domestic. By aligning the father with the children of the family, often forming a unit in opposition to the mother, the ‘traditional’ power of the patriarch is denied by making him a foolish, literally childlike figure. This also has the potential effect of maintaining a sense of distance between domestic and non-domestic masculinity that only integrates masculinity into the family in a conditional manner, figuring it as a non-innate selection of learnt skills that often must be supervised by the mother, yet further reinforcing both her ultimate dominance within, and her responsibility for, the maintenance of a form of domestic harmony.

In the opening episode of series five, entitled *Greed* (S5: E1), Ben buys a lottery ticket despite having discussed the matter with Bill and them ‘agreeing’ that no one in the family would play. Bill rumbles Ben’s plan when their teenage son lets it slip that he is staying in to watch the live draw, thus alerting us to the fact that he is in collusion with his father, against his mothers wishes. Already the father is figured as a

bad influence, encouraging his son to lie and to gamble. Upon Ben's return from work, Bill calls a family meeting, during which they all sit round the dining table discussing reasons that they shouldn't play the lottery: primarily the long odds of actually winning anything. During this meeting there is an obvious hierarchy of both knowledge and responsibility amongst the four members of the family. Bill's attempts to explain the long odds to Ben are hampered by his inability to do the necessary mathematics and his childlike assertion that the fact that it is a 'rollover week', in which the unclaimed prize from last week is added to the jackpot for this week's draw, in some way effect this. While the son supports his father's argument, the daughter of the family looks on exasperated, speaking only to offer up solutions to the mathematical problems with which he is struggling.

The scene is exemplary of the character dynamics throughout the series. Lines of intelligence and common sense are drawn according to both gender and seniority, with the mother ultimately imbued with both the ability and the responsibility for regulating the whims of the rest of her household. The father is not only aligned with the children but is also shown to be more childish even than his daughter, who, despite her own propensity towards an adolescent brattishness, must begin to assume some level of wisdom in preparation for her assumed future role.

Both the father and the son, on the other hand, are figured as stuck in a state of arrested development. The father's inability to grasp the mathematics of gambling, despite that fact that he is shown to be capable of running his own plumbing business elsewhere in the series, placing him in the position of pupil in contrast to both his wife and daughter's role as teacher in the scene. His childlike nature is also highlighted throughout the remainder of the episode, in which the family discuss what they would do with their share of the lottery winnings, and he shares his dream of spending the

money on three new players for Tottenham Hotspur, who would each wear his name on their football shirt. This pointless and unrealistic fantasy is thrown into sharp relief when it is Bill's replacement ticket for one she believes to have been lost that actually secures a small win, offering the capital she needs to start up her own catering business. While Ben already runs his own business, throughout this episode it is Bill who is shown to take the greater active responsibility for economic provision, spending her time fretting about the family finances and rejecting the childish fantasies of the other family members in favour of ensuring long term economic well-being. Bill's assumption of domestic responsibility is so total, with both domestic and economic issues falling under her broad remit, that there is arguably no role left for Ben, other than that of the overgrown child. As the show's creator and writer, Andrew Marshall, often suggested, the father's alignment with the children is so total that he could almost be considered the "point 4" of the title, once again demonstrating the gulf between the notion of an 'average', nuclear family and the increasing difficulty of representing the same.

The model of family life portrayed in *2 Point 4 Children* is partially echoed in the hugely successful sitcom *My Family* (2000-). While the essentially working-class nature of the Porters arguably grounded the occasional flights into surreal whimsy and farce in their ongoing financial struggles, the middle-class nature of the Harper family frees *My Family* from addressing any such concerns. The father of the family, Ben Harper/Robert Lindsay, is a successful professional with his own dental practice. At home, however, he is shown to be a self-absorbed and largely incapable of exerting any influence over his family. His ability to provide economically results in constant griping about the amount of money his family spend, while the constant stream of waifs and strays that he is persuaded to take in throughout the series demonstrates an

inability to maintain the boundaries of his own nuclear unit. This permeability is accompanied by a surreal humour that ultimately serves to remove the nuclear family unit portrayed in *My Family* from the realm of reality. While the ultimately successful emotional relationships forged between the characters ensures that *My Family* does not present the same mean-spirited dismantling of the nuclear family that provided the comedy in *Married...With Children*, it does demonstrate the same impossibility of representing a positive model of the traditional, patriarchal nuclear family in a believable fashion. The comedy in *My Family* derives from each character's flaws being amplified to cartoonish proportions and the, often ludicrous, situations that they find themselves in as a result. In this sense, the Harpers once again embody the gulf between the myth and reality of the family, with the centrality of Ben's inability to significantly grow or change across ten series the most obvious example of this clash between an outmoded model and an increasingly apparent reality.

On both sides of the Atlantic this disparity between the ideal and the reality is, of course, most obviously exemplified by the defining father of television comedy in the last twenty years: Homer Simpson/Dan Castellaneta. The inherent unreality of the nuclear Simpson family, based as they are in a cartoon universe, is the logical conclusion of the increasing acknowledgement of the limitations of this model, as expressed through all the families discussed thus far. *The Simpsons* satirical impulse begins with its attempt to insert a more nuanced model of suburban family life into the American 'everytown' of Springfield, opening the door for broader social satire of other institutions, including church, school and politics. Yet the nuclear family survives this process and the fact that the show continues to frame the satire through the traditional domestic sitcom both demonstrates and comments upon the perceived

centrality of this model of family life to the maintenance of the broader society, both on television and in wider discourse.

As with the other families discussed previously, however, *The Simpsons* does not simply regurgitate a 'traditional' model of the nuclear family, even though it mirrors the 1950s ideal as shown in *Father Knows Best* in its basic make-up almost exactly. Once again, it is through the figure of the father that the differences between the Simpsons and the Andersons become most apparent. While Homer nominally fulfils the fatherly duties with which he is tasked, holding down a steady job at the Springfield nuclear power plant to provide for his family, he is also preternaturally stupid, clumsy, oafish and irresponsible. While there are many instances in which Homer is shown to be childish, as in *The Simpson's* British contemporaries, there are also many moments at which even his children are shown to be frustrated by his intense stupidity. Equally, while the show allows for the fact that Homer does manage to provide for his family (even though his work at the power plant is demonstrably sub par and non-existent in later episodes), the regular instances in which his wife Marge/Hank Azaria leaves him also demonstrate an exaggerated version of the wife-as-mother dynamic familiar from *2 Point 4 Children*. In the only partially ironically titled episode *Secrets of A Successful Marriage* (5:22), Homer gets thrown out of the family home by Marge after he reveals their intimate secrets to his marriage guidance class, simultaneously demonstrating his self-centred nature and lack of expertise in the subject he is meant to be teaching. Not allowed to return until he works out what it is that Marge actually derives from her relationship with Homer, he eventually wins his place back in the home when he realises he offers "complete and utter dependence".

Yet Homer, despite his immense stupidity and self-centred nature, could be said to have become the de facto hero of *The Simpsons*. In the acres of print that have been dedicated to analysing the programme Homer often inspires the greatest range of interpretations, just as his endlessly madcap schemes generally inspire the narrative action within the show itself. As such, Homer has been read as the central embodiment of the contradictions at the heart of *The Simpsons*' satire. His bumbling incompetence as a father places him in the category of embodying the contradiction between our expectations of a patriarch and the plurality of literal fathers: "Bart and Lisa show little respect for their oafish father, routinely commenting on his 'half-assed under-parenting' ... In fact, Bart has so little respect for this man that he refuses to call him dad" (Butsch in Feasey, 2008, p.36). Homer exemplifies the inability of creating a coherent model of domestic masculinity under the weight of expectations of the patriarch, familiar in television comedy from Archie Bunker onwards, to the point at which even his own children are unclear how they should label him.

Homer's popularity is not solely based on the humorous disjunction between his inabilities as a father and the father's traditional position of dominance within the nuclear family, however. Instead Homer also embodies aspects of contemporary culture that are often in direct opposition to this 'traditional' model of patriarchal masculinity. Valerie Weisun Chow, for example, suggests that:

"The hyperconsciousness of *The Simpsons* reproduces Homer as the stereotypical consumer within commodity capitalism. What is ironic is that the idealized nature of iconicity as a concept makes it impossible by definition for the sign (Homer Simpson) to accurately resemble both of its referents (head-of-household *and* feminized consumer). (2004, p.114)

Homer's rapacious and indiscriminate appetites define him throughout the series almost as much as his place within the structure of the family. His love of beer and doughnuts forms the basis of multiple plots while one of his recurring catchphrases is

the addition of the prefix “mmm” to anything that inspires his bottomless greed, be it foodstuff or mathematical concept, from “mmm...doughnuts” (3:17 ‘Homer At The Bat’) to “mmm...pi” (4:21 ‘Marge In Chains’). In this sense, as Chow suggests, Homer both adopts the traditionally feminized role of the domestic consumer, while the exaggerated nature of his consumption, the trouble in which it regularly lands him and its clearly apparent toll on his physical well-being, comments on the impossibility of representing this unfettered consumption through the same figure on whom should also be inscribed the show’s model of patriarchy.

Homer’s constant clashes with authority and social convention also figure him as the most likely threat to this ‘traditional’ order, rather than its staunch defender in the face of social change, as is the case with Archie Bunker. When Homer decides that he would rather stay in bed than go to church on a cold Sunday morning he does just that. Equally, when Homer realises that he is just a few pounds away from being so obese that he would have to be allowed to work from home he sees this as an opportunity for further laziness, rather than a threat to his health. Homer’s increasingly liberal attitude to alternative lifestyles, with references to his potentially confused sexuality abounding as the show grows older, mark him out as the liberal force in opposition to his wife’s more conservative impulse (although, in the anarchic spirit of the show, it is possible for this dynamic to be reversed should the plot require it).

These threats to the ‘natural’ order of the nuclear family are consistently resolved, in the grand tradition of the family sitcom, through an ultimate return to the status quo at the end of each episode. *The Simpson*’s regularly undercuts any complacency that this may inspire, however, by making ironic reference to this process, or by subverting the audience’s expectation of a moral lesson to be learnt. In

Homer's case a return to the status quo means a return to his id-driven impulsiveness, rather than a version of domestic masculinity even temporarily modified by the narrative arc of each episode.

His liberal attitudes, gift for consumption and overwhelming adherence to the principle of ultimate personal liberty makes Homer the embodiment of the ideal citizen within Western consumer culture. Yet his exaggerated stupidity, his corpulence and his self-centred nature also serve to satirise this idealness. In Homer's ability to embody many of the contradictions between our dominant mythologies for men and women and the ability to enact these mythologies in real life he presents to us the logical conclusion of the use of the sitcom father to exhibit the tensions between the television's idealised families and the lived experience of family life. In addition, Homer is also used to explore the tensions between other non-family related values, such as our attitudes to work and consumption. This exploration is more easily read by an audience, due both to the privileged place his demographic holds in our society, once again using the carnivalesque inversion of the 'traditional' image of fatherhood as concerned with sober responsibility and economic provision, and through our familiarity with this approach from previous examples of the genre.

The central irony of *The Simpsons* is that it is by removing fatherhood and the family from any attempt to represent the 'real' and placing them within a cartoon universe, the show gives itself the freedom to explore these very real tensions more fully than ever before. This more effectively highlights the difference between the 'truths' that the show reveals about family life, and society more generally, through satire and lived experience of its audience. As Valerie Weillun Chow suggests: "What is revealed by *The Simpsons* is the very failure of the televisual to represent the norm" (2004, p.114). *The Simpsons* demonstrates that end point of a trajectory

observable in all of the sitcoms discussed: the inability of a mythological norm of nuclear family life to remain viable in the face of both social change and discursive focus. The complexities of Homer's character also demonstrate the end point of the embodiment of this process through the figure of the father, with the very idea of patriarchal authority mocked by his inability to take responsibility for almost any aspect of either domestic or work life. Yet, through his id-driven pursuit of constant gratification, Homer's rejection of this authority offers both us, and himself, a greater freedom. Somehow, he has become our primary model of fatherhood, not because of what he is but because of what he is not. The satirical thrust of the show makes it clear that we are not meant to wish to be like him, yet we may well feel we have more in common with him than with the potentially sanctimonious perfection of Jim Anderson or Bill Cosby. By dismantling the 'traditional' model of nuclear family fatherhood to the point at which it is only recognisable as a counterpoint to the inverse behaviour that Homer exhibits, *The Simpsons* opens up a space in which a more varied model can be conceived. By allowing Homer to primarily represent this potential freedom, rather than embodying a previous model struggling against this broadening discourse, the mockery with which the authority of the sitcom father is traditionally eroded takes on an almost heroic quality. The most objectively 'bad' of fathers, terrible to the point of absurdity, becomes the 'best' and perhaps even the most 'realistic', through an acknowledgment of the shifting discourse of fatherhood and the opening up of a space in which alternative models can be conceived.

5: Representing Fatherhood and Consumption in Television Advertising

What becomes apparent from analysis of the representation of the family and fatherhood in both academic literature and popular culture is that throughout the latter half of the 20th century, and into the early part of the 21st, certain ideologies that underpinned the most common notions of family life were threatened by a relentless discursive focus, under which the inequalities and inadequacies of the ideal of a single dominant model were routinely exposed. Alongside the commonly identified narrative of a steady erosion of the dominance of the 'traditional', nuclear family, and the continuing emphasis on a more pluralistic understanding of familial relationships, validated by much of the discursive analysis undertaken thus far, including sitcom's reliance on such discursive tension for the creation of humour, it has also been suggested that this process is part of a longer, historical debate surrounding the make-up of the family.

Many of the theoretical discussions encountered on the nuclear family posit at least some connection between the form's cultural dominance and the requirements of a capitalist, industrialised economy, thus generally extending their analysis at least as far back as the industrial revolution. Analyses of the representation of family life in popular culture, arguably necessarily, tend to focus their attention on the post-World War II period. While it could easily be argued that what we currently understand to be 'popular culture', or perhaps what we could more accurately if somewhat anachronistically term 'mass culture', is essentially a product of this period, with the rise of television and its impact on the domestic sphere providing the most relevant example of the historically situated nature of certain representations, it is important to

continue to emphasise the longer history of the discursive challenges to the dominance of the nuclear family model and the way this impacts on popular culture. In this way we can avoid falling into the trap of positing the 1950s as a prelapsarian ideal of discursive coherence, after which the apparent reciprocal relationship between the demographic and cultural threats to the dominance of the nuclear model of the family begin the process of dismantling it in earnest.

Through analysis of representations of fatherhood during this period it becomes apparent that while the post-war baby boom may have lead to a situation in which the nuclear model was demographically dominant the commonly perceived discursive dominance of the nuclear model was less assured. While patriarchal role models, such as Jim Anderson from *Father Knows Best*, appeared to work to sustain a particular model of family life, even the most cosily conservative of sitcoms found room for debates about women's place within the workforce, alongside other challenges to the cultural norms seemingly at the heart of such programmes.

While the status quo is re-established by the end of each episode the show has become, at least partially, a dramatisation of the wider debates surrounding changes in family life, rather than the simple restatement of universally accepted, and thus generally unspoken, cultural norms. By placing the family at the centre of post-war popular culture, as television did more than any other medium, these debates were inevitably opened up to a wider audience, both reflecting and motivating continuing shifts in the representation of both the family and the father's place within it. By using the father to embody many of these debates, the tensions between the perceived rigidity of the patriarchal nuclear model and a range of alternative models could be dramatised in mainstream programming while still retaining a commonly accepted model of family life at its core. In this way many of the most popular texts, a label

whose very definition inevitably reminds us that viewing figures play a central role in constituting our object of study, have been able to represent an image of the family that exhibits a balance between conservatism and progressiveness in their attempts to offer an image reassuringly familiar from our awareness of a discursively dominant model, yet flexible enough to appeal to our own lived experiences. This balancing act can prove perilous however; and nowhere is this more apparent, nor the complex relationship between shifting representations of the family and the cultural and economic context in which they are produced more obvious, than in television advertising.

Television advertising relies on shared meanings between the text and the consumer to allow its promotional messages to be received and, in the ideal scenario, acted upon. Like any form of culture that shares this underlying profit motive, advertising must look to the real life experiences of its audience to provide context for the messages that it produces. This is not a closed system, in which people's lives are faithfully translated to the small screen to be reflected back to them, with added product weaved in:

“Due to the very nature of TV language, texts cannot be considered as unities but as part of a ‘discourse’ on social reality that they help to construct while being part of it. For this reason, and also because of their structural brevity, advertisements tend to capitalize upon recurrent images and forms of presentation; in doing so they reinforce them, not so much through the individual texts as through the accumulation and repetition of ‘ritualized’ representation during the entire advertising flow.” (Giaccardi, 1995, p.116)

The need for advertising to sell products necessitates the representation of a version of reality that makes the product seem appealing and, thus, the versions of reality that advertising represents will shape and distort the reality the text is drawing upon. As Sut Jhally suggests:

“Advertisements...draw us in in two ways. First, we depend upon the meaning they provide for the definition of our social lives. Second, they depend upon our knowledge of referent systems for the operation of meaning.” (1990, p.139)

For products that have less defined markets these referent systems are much larger for both advertiser and consumer. Unlike the marketing of a product for a select group (toy adverts, for example, need only to draw on children’s experiences of the product to build an appeal to their primary consumer) those products that are consumed by a larger number of people must exhibit a broader appeal. This carries the attendant risk, however, that this broader appeal will appear unrealistic to the section of the audience for whom, rather inevitably, experience does not correspond with the reality represented.

This explains why so much advertising, potentially to an even greater extent than the programmes that surround it, appears to rely on cultural norms and stereotypes. In order to appeal to the widest range of consumers advertising is forced to use referent systems that are easily understandable to the vast majority of people. Gender and family provide two of the most far-reaching options, with most people choosing to identify themselves as both a gendered individual and as part of some variation of a family. Consequently, they have become staples of television advertising from its inception to the present day. As this suggests, television’s fundamental prioritisation of the family does not simply extend to its modes of scheduling and commissioning programmes but arguably has just as great an impact on the advertising that supports it financially. Just as mainstream programming, certainly for the many years prior to the increasing diversity of the contemporary multi-channel context, made attempts to appeal to a mythical demographic norm in order to maximise audience share, advertising also commonly made appeals to this

mythical norm in a bid to make their messages understood by the maximum number of consumers.

Advertising faces the added pressure, however, of requiring people to not simply respond and relate to the messages that it presents but also to act upon them. In essence, the economic impetus of advertising broadly dictates that, if it does not increase uptake of the product or service that it is advertising then it can be defined as unsuccessful, however closely the messages represented within the text may chime with the lived experience of the audience. When it comes to representing the family, as with so much else, advertising has often attempted to imbue its object with various attributes through an appeal to an idealised version of reality that can potentially be achieved through acquisition of a certain product or service. Just as mainstream programming has had to respond to discursive and demographic shifts in the make-up of the family, however, it has also been necessary for advertising to temper its reliance on the nuclear family model as wider discourses on the family have shifted. As in situation comedy, advertising has not remained immune from the desire to dramatise the tension between older and newer notions of family life through the figure of the father. Unlike sitcom, or any of the mainstream television genres, however, this tension can often prove a potential threat to the key promotional impetus behind the advertising text, complicating the text's ability to distinguish a product or service as being attractive to consumers through the representation of an idealised reality.

Advertising, for the most part, has responded to this threat by acknowledging the constructed and unrealistic nature of the message that it presents, while simultaneously retaining the representations that make it readable. The image of an incompetent masculinity, which pervades so much contemporary advertising

featuring family life or taking place within the domestic sphere, is just one technique through which advertising can demonstrate a level of textual awareness that corresponds to the awareness of its audience. The often cartoonish nature of these representations both presents hyper-real versions of contemporary masculinities and critiques them through a comedic acknowledgement of their excessive nature. Like all advertising techniques, however, once this formation of domestic masculinity becomes a common code it ceases to be effective, merely replacing the previous codes in the audiences' awareness as outmoded and unrealistic.

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Setting A Precedent: Defining Masculine and Feminine Spheres in Advertising

In order to understand the way in which television advertising's representation of the family and fatherhood has responded to broader discursive changes we must first outline certain tropes that have proven to be central to the medium since its inception. It is clear, both from previous analyses of the history of advertising and even the briefest glance at the earliest examples of the medium, that television advertising has always relied on an appeal to image, lifestyle and myth rather than a simple outlining of a product's use value. William Leiss *et al*, in a comprehensive study of the medium, suggest that, as early as the 1920s, print advertising began to move away from the broadly "Product-Oriented Approach" to the use of "Product Symbols" (Leiss *et al*, 2005, p.155). By the time of television's explosion in popularity in the 1950s, and certainly by the time of the introduction of commercial television in the UK in 1955, advertising's propensity to associate products with seemingly idealised versions of reality was already causing concern in some quarters. By 1960, the release of Vance Packard's, *The Hidden Persuaders*, a best-selling account of the advertising

industry's attempts to influence the public through the use of the psychoanalytically-influenced 'depth approach', demonstrated that people were already worried about the social effects of an increase in mass media, and the concurrent increase in advertising needed to support it.

What is clear from early use of the now familiar visions of idealised realities regularly shown in television advertising, and the distrust that certain sections of the public felt towards the use of such tactics for promotional ends, is that, once again, the 1950s and 1960s represented a juncture at which there were certain key shifts in our popular culture. While Leiss *et al* characterise our present situation as living through the 'fifth phase' of advertising, in which consumers are so wearily familiar with the tropes of advertising that they are to some degree immune (2005, p.153), the earliest days of the medium represented a point at which, at least according to commentators such as Packard, advertising had moved away from rational appeals based on the practical attributes of the product, to utilising a psychological appeal based on placing your product within a desirable symbolic realm. Unlike 'fifth phase' consumers, however, so steeped in this approach that the danger for advertisers becomes their immunity to the messages rather than their seduction by them, the earliest days of television advertising represent a time at which this idealising impulse could still be construed as controversial rather than simply passé. As in our analysis of the development of the family sitcom during the 1950s and 1960s, analysing the representation of the family in advertising of the same era demonstrates, once again, that these debates about the construction and the effect of new popular culture discourses both reflect, and participate in, wider shifts in a broader discourse on the family.

Popular stock cube brand, OXO, have based their television advertising around the image of the nuclear family and its relationship to the home for so long that the very idea of the ‘OXO Family’ has taken on something of an iconic status. The most famous permutation, which originally ran from 1983 to 1999 before returning in 2001 after complaints from bereft viewers (MediaGuardian, 2001), followed the trials and tribulations of a mother and father as their three children grew older and eventually left home to start their own lives. The creation of a soap opera in miniature that followed the ups and downs of this family served the company well, being cited as a key factor in increasing sales of their product by 10% within the first year (Roberts, 2007).

A similar approach of creating a soap opera in miniature had served them well for decades prior to this peak in popularity, however. In 1958, three years after the introduction of commercial television to the UK, OXO introduced the nation to Katie/Mary Holland, a dutiful housewife serving dinner for her husband. The subsequent series of adverts featuring the character of Katie, and adding additional family members as it progressed, ran for 18 years, from 1958 to 1970, proving hugely popular with the British public and setting the template for the ‘OXO family’ that followed. While this original offers a very basic template for these future adverts, retaining a strong focus on the product’s use value alongside its heavily ideological representation of gendered domesticity, it does introduce some of the key principles that, we shall see, extend into later representations of the family in advertising.

The advert begins with a shot of a cookbook, entitled “Cooking with OXO”. The brand logo is prominent and the book’s title outlines at least the basic facts of the product’s intended use, even for those viewers to whom it is unfamiliar. In this way the advert arguably prioritises prior recognition of the brand, and its use value, over a

representation of the lifestyle this product can help you achieve. Unlike later adverts for the same brand, in which the narrative of family life has become so central that the product need not even be named in order for the viewer to recognise what the advert was promoting, this advert belongs to a period in which building a brand required creating a positive association between the practical application of the product and the image presented on screen. As the advert progresses, however, we can see that the product's use and the effects that this can potentially achieve are interwoven, shifting the focus onto a strongly ideological lifestyle image.

As the cookbook opens the advert cuts to a close up of Katie's face. This framing device, familiar from countless films from the same era and particularly from those based on fairy tale narratives, is especially interesting as it hints at an idealised reality at odds with the advert's recognisable, and relatively mundane, domestic setting. The fact that Katie is perfectly made-up, coiffured, and dressed relatively formally for dinner also imbues the advert with a sense of studied perfection that ties in with the text's message that this particular lifestyle is an ideal to be achieved with the help of OXO.

Katie directly addresses the camera throughout the advert, introducing herself with a cheery, "Katie speaking". This is a significantly different approach from later adverts, which adopted a more naturalistic, 'fly-on-the-wall' style, once again serving to subsume product information beneath a depiction of family life. In the earlier advert, however, Katie leads not by unspoken example but by direct appeal to the consumer. Additionally, the viewer is invited to conspire with Katie as she tells us that "Philip's trying to read his paper, but he can smell the OXO jacket potatoes I'm cooking".

Within the first few moments of this advert we can begin to see familiar tropes forming that have continued to characterise television advertising's representation of family life, and the domestic setting in which it is enacted. Firstly, it is clear that the advert is primarily addressing a female consumer. By the 1950s it is generally supposed that advertisers were working under the assumption that women wielded the majority of spending power within the economy, as they generally took responsibility budgeting for essential, regular purchases, such as food and other household items. In fact, Simone Weil Davis identifies a similar emphasis on the female consumer in print adverts as early as the 1920s, commenting that "both mythically and statistically a woman was and is the primary consumer, and so holds considerable economic power" (Davis, 2000, p. 82), while Vance Packard, writing around the same time as the *Katie* series' first appearance, describes the uneven way in which the nuclear family is targeted by advertisers thusly; "The female interests merchandisers more than the male breadwinner because it is the female that typically controls about eighty percent of the family's purchasing decisions" (Packard, 1960, p.100). Once again, these arguments point us towards a more complex dispersal of power relations in the representation of the patriarchal, nuclear family than one might perceive on first viewing of an ultimately conventional stereotype of the 1950s housewife, as presented in the form of Katie. While advertising, like the majority of the flow of popular programming that it exists within, appears to enshrine an established patriarchal model of the nuclear family it simultaneously reflects the social and discursive challenges to that model:

“...texts cannot be considered as unities but as part of a ‘discourse’ on social reality that they help to construct while being part of it. For this reason, and also because of their structural brevity, advertisements tend to capitalize upon recurrent images and forms of presentation; in doing so they reinforce them, not so much through the individual texts as through the accumulation and repetition of ‘ritualized’ representation during the entire advertising flow.” (Giaccardi, 1995, p.116)

As the advert progresses, a strange dialectic of domestic power demonstrates that even in its earliest incarnations, television advertising, like the broader discourse of which it forms a part, struggled to reconcile the increased economic importance of women and their assumed subservience in the home with the assumed economic dominance of men and their discursive exclusion from the domestic, an increasingly prime site of consumption. While sitcoms such as *Father Knows Best* made pains to re-establish a patriarchal status quo at the end of each episode, much of the programme’s comedy was derived from the perceived absurdity of challenges to this traditional model. Similarly, while the *Katie* series establishes an extremely patriarchal model of gendered domesticity, it could be argued that its privileging of the female consumer demonstrates the increasingly complicated nature of appealing to the economic dominance of the housewife, while simultaneously attempting to reinforce the ‘traditional’ dominance of her husband.

As the advert progresses it becomes increasingly clear that the promotional message is aimed exclusively at the female consumer. As Katie removes the jacket potatoes from the oven she continues outlining the virtues of OXO directly to camera. The main visual focus is on a direct demonstration of product use, cutting from Katie removing a tray from the oven to a close up of the prepared food. Katie’s complimentary commentary offers a more subjective take on the product, reminding the viewer how its sensory qualities can improve their own cooking. “A good, rich smell is half the secret of cooking, isn’t it?” she chimes rhetorically, flattering us that

we, as the assumed female viewer, already possessed this knowledge. Once she has removed the dish from the oven, however, she turns her attention away from the viewer and onto her unseen husband, calling him through from the other room.

As Philip/Richard Clarke enters the kitchen the advert begins to function as two simultaneous narrative strands. The first is a continuation of Katie's personified voiceover, enquiring conversationally, "Did you know you add all the flavours of nine delicious ingredients when you add OXO?" The second strand comprises all of Katie's interaction with Philip, and appears to take place behind a 'fourth wall' that can only be broken by Katie herself. Philip interrupts her sales pitch with a complimentary, "Mmm, that smells good", but he is denied access to his dinner until he has rewarded her with a kiss on the cheek and a, somewhat patronising, "clever girl". The advert then ends with an intertextual reference to the campaign's accompanying print advertising as Katie says, "See, the advert's right", before intoning the product slogan, "OXO gives a meal man-appeal" over a title card featuring both the slogan and the 'OXO Bull', the company's established logo.

This advert, originally shown as part of a series of three to be screened throughout the same evening covering the complete process from cooking to dining to preparing for bed, demonstrates many of the tensions surrounding the representation of the family in the relatively fledgling medium of television advertising. While the character's dress and the décor in their home indicate an aspirational, broadly middle-class model of family life, with Philip's suit suggesting white collar rather than blue collar employment and Katie's evening wear hinting at a sophistication beyond the mundanity of her domestic duties, the campaign was extremely careful not to alienate the sizeable working class market. In a discussion of the creation of the campaign,

John Pearson and Graham Turner describe how Anthony Pugh, the advertising executive ultimately responsible for the creation of the *Katie* series,

“...supervised the making of two commercials- one, as he said, ‘the usual idiot thing of a girl in a fantasy kitchen throwing up a large cube and singing- the other a documentary deal with a straight-forward women presenter (sic)’. The second commercial was ultimately to produce Katie, the OXO housewife.” (Pearson and Turner, 1966, p.58)

Here we see the balance that it has been generally necessary for products primarily intended for use within the domestic sphere to strike in their advertising. While much has been written about the aspirational tone of many advertising messages, turning to the marketing of luxury goods such as perfumes or holidays to show how many advertising methods rely on imbuing products with a potentially unattainable aura of glamour to make them desirable to consumers, creating the drive to purchase those products more closely associated with the drudgery of everyday tasks requires a more complex approach.

While research suggested that members of the public were actually happier with the first, ‘fantasy’ advert, Pugh realised that the correct balance between the two elements may well prove more effective in appealing to both core and new customers. By casting someone who, in Pearson and Turner’s words, seemed as “unexceptional as it was possible to be”, Katie tested well with the next market research group, with “eighty percent saying they actually liked her.... ‘We feel she’s one of us’, was a typical reaction” (1966, p.59). By combining the ‘documentary’ aspect of the first approach, and having Katie extolling the virtues of OXO direct to camera, the advert manages to relay product information and demonstrate the product in use, all within a setting recognisable to the widest range of viewers, an approach that remains common in the advertising of domestic goods to this present day.

The *Katie* series is clearly not completely free of the ‘fantasy’ approach, however. Just as the team behind the advert spent a long time deciding on the best way to make the characters within it recognisable to their audience they also clearly spent a great deal of time focusing on the markers of class that would appear in the text. Despite Turner and Pearson’s suggestion that the agency responsible for the advert, “thought we should make her fairly indeterminate- as classless as possible”, their admission that they also “thought of her husband (Philip) as being someone in a fairly good clerical job, at the beginning of the executive ladder if you like” (1966, p.59), suggests that, economically at least, Katie and Philip represented an ideal of middle-class marriage. A central brief of the advert was to alter the perception of OXO as an “old-fashioned and cheap product”, unfortunately associated, as it was, with the replacement of actual meat stock in the context of post-war austerity. This suggests that, while Katie and Philip may represent a recognisable model of marriage, their union also needed to be capable of imbuing OXO with at least some sense of luxury, legitimising its position in the kitchens of those who could easily replace it with increasingly affordable alternatives.

The result is a representation of marriage that is, to an extent, an idealised depiction of a broadly patriarchal system. The advert, and its accompanying slogan, makes it clear that OXO’s primary use is in the creation of meals that will satisfy the male half of this union, by giving a meal ‘man-appeal’. There is scant indication at any point during the advert that Katie will, or even should, derive any pleasure from her own labours. Equally it is clear that it is not expected, or desired, that Philip should take any responsibility for these domestic duties, as he is entirely absent from the advert until he is required to approve the results. The patronising rewards that he bestows upon his wife, a kiss on the cheek and a perfunctory “clever girl”, arguably

validate his ultimate authority and Katie's 'natural' subservience, even more so due to the fact that they are requested by her as the meagre price for her services, rather than proffered voluntarily. Even the briefest analysis of this advert suggests a key characteristic of the way domestic relationships continue to be used in television advertising to this day. The *Katie* series clearly presents an apparently positive representation of the desirability of a 'traditional', patriarchal marriage, which is inextricably associated with the positive way in which the product is presented. Katie's ability to please her husband, thus fulfilling her wifely duties, is seen as a consequence of her use of OXO and, consequently, the promotional thrust of the text aligns the two processes as being of equal desirability.

The fact that the advert both primarily focuses on and addresses a female consumer, however, arguably complicates this simplistic validation of a patriarchal model. It is only by removing Philip almost entirely from the narrative that the advert can imbue Katie with the necessary promotional power to present a positive representation of the product in use and yet maintain this dynamic. This approach foregrounds an assumption of the absence of the masculine from the domestic sphere that derives from the broader discourse of the time. Philip is present in the text, however, and this presence requires that he is factored into the discourse *as* an absence. The advert's dual narrative achieves this by drawing a distinction between the domestic world that the advert portrays and the commentary on that world that Katie offers.

Within the domestic world of the advert Philip's position is decidedly ambiguous. He is shown to be easily manipulated via an appeal to his most basic drives (the smell of jacket potatoes cooking distracts him from reading the paper) while also being imbued with the ability to judge the success of domestic chores (his

proffering of “clever girl” bolstered by the campaign’s slogan). Equally, he is figured as a recipient of domestic service, not even entering the kitchen until his meal is ready. In this way, the advert recreates a broadly patriarchal model of marriage, with the activities of the dutiful wife focused on the maintenance of her husband’s happiness and his role within the domestic sphere necessarily limited to receiving her attentions, preoccupied as he presumably is with his key responsibilities outside the home.

Yet the more complex interplay between these ‘traditional’ roles within the couple’s domestic arrangement and the tone of the advert serve to show how advertising, like the programming it supported, became part of the process of interrogating these norms as it ultimately restated them. While Philip possesses the power to pass judgement on Katie’s cooking, it is she who possesses the power to both manipulate his behaviour and to relate to the consumer that the text addresses. This restates the assumption of separate spheres of experience by locating Katie’s sphere of competence within the domestic sphere, and reasserts Philip’s competence outside of the domestic sphere by predicating his virtual absence from the text on his reading of the newspaper, thus concerning himself with worldly rather than domestic matters. Yet, like the 1950s father in situation comedy, his simultaneous absence from the domestic sphere and presence within the text must be accounted for.

Katie’s gentle manipulation of Philip sets the template for the way in which television advertising has most commonly responded to the challenge of representing masculinity within the domestic sphere from the 1950s onwards. As in the situation comedies that it funded, it is generally through the figure of the father that the changing make-up of the family and the domestic sphere can be investigated. Like comedy, however, in which the comedic impulse opens up a satirical textual space in

which challenges to domestic harmony may be the catalyst for drama, in advertising the impetus to retain a coherent, desirable model of family life becomes increasingly less important. As the eventual success of the Katie advert, in the face of disapproval from the original focus group to which it was shown, proves perfectly, advertising set in the domestic sphere increasingly benefits from acknowledging the imperfections of the model at its core, creating a problem which can be solved through use of the product advertised.

While there is minimal tension in the *Katie* adverts, and the heterosexual marriage at its core is shown to be both coherent and desirable, the complex and differing power relationships between husband and wife within the advert's two narrative strands (on either side of the fourth wall), allow for the beginnings of this shift away from idealised advertising towards a more realistic approach to be identified. While the assumption of separate spheres of experience at the heart of the nuclear family model is retained, it is also complicated by the husband's presence within the representation of a sphere from which he is more commonly defined as absent. It is only by ceding responsibility for maintenance of the domestic sphere to his wife that Philip can maintain his 'traditional' position of higher social status within the union.

Yet the makers of this series did not decide to absent the husband from this advert entirely, perhaps in favour of a less complex representation of masculinity within the separate sphere of employment. Instead they gain promotional benefit from contrasting his desire to read the paper with the irresistible nature of Katie's OXO-assisted cooking, subtly shifting the power relationship in favour of Katie throughout the advert before returning it to the status quo at the end. This technique, familiar from situation comedy, demonstrates how television advertising replicates the

discourse of masculinity's problematic place within the domestic sphere in order to flatter an assumed female consumer. Having enshrined this discourse from the earliest days of the form, it has come to shape and inform advertising that takes place within the domestic sphere for successive decades, replicating and gradually exaggerating the shifting power dynamics between Katie and Philip to create a discourse in which responsibility for domestic maintenance is entirely feminine and the notion of a competent and coherent domestic masculinity is simultaneously and consistently mocked while also being shown to be increasingly desirable.

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Mother Knows Best: The Evolution of the OXO Family and Masculine Domestic Incompetence

The next iconic OXO household, forming the basis of a series of long running adverts between 1983 and 1999, demonstrates the development of these trends both through representing a complete nuclear family unit and through regularly making explicit the negotiations that must take place for the father to integrate himself into the domestic scenario. As an example from 1990 demonstrates, in the "OXO family" as they were simply referred to, it is assumed that the mother is primarily responsible for the correct execution of all domestic duties. Yet, not for the first time, her decision to put her feet up and watch television leads to the father of the family having to make dinner. In sharp contrast to the depiction of the kitchen as an exclusively feminine space, as in the *Katie* series, the 1980s equivalent opens with a shot of the father cooking.

The addition of children to this domestic scenario also allows for a greater range of relationships to be explored and the next character to enter the kitchen is the

family's teenage son, who acts relatively unsurprised that the father is cooking, thus normalising his actions to some extent. The apparent normality of this scenario is undercut, however, by the jocular tone in which they converse. "Hi Dad, what's on tonight?", asks the son, to which the father replies, "Looks like some sort of weepie to me". "Looks like chops to me", quips the teenager, undercutting the father's assumption that he was enquiring about what his mother was watching on television and making humorous his apparent need to explain his incongruous presence in the kitchen. As he dishes up the chops, however, his daughter enters the kitchen and greets his cooking with a dismissive, "Ahhh, Mum's chops usually come with gravy". Once again we can see the split between male incompetence and female competence that also often formed the basis for the comedy in shows like *2 Point 4 Children*.

It is in the restatement of this discursive approach that the advert tries to balance the father's presence in the home with his common removal from the broader discourse of domestic family life. Crucially, he is shown to be capable of undertaking the traditionally female activity of cookery but there is the ever-present threat that he will be unable to properly complete the task without the supervision of one of the women in his household. Not only is it left up to the daughter to point out his apparent error, the look of confused exasperation that this provokes makes it clear she must also guide him through the process of correcting it. Despite the fact that he has clearly been using the kitchen to prepare the evening meal it is obvious that he doesn't know where the gravy is kept and his daughter has to tell him that it is "Next to the toaster, in the jar".

Erving Goffman identifies a similar tactic running through print advertising for products used in the domestic sphere, suggesting that men are either seen as completely disengaged from 'female' tasks so as to protect themselves from

“subordination or contamination” or, alternatively, presented as “...ludicrous or childlike, unrealistically so, as if perhaps in making him candidly unreal the competency image of real males could be preserved” (1979, p.36). The first, more old-fashioned, approach is the one adopted by the *Katie* series, complicating the competence with which Katie is imbued throughout the advert by suggesting an alternative level of competence outside of the domestic sphere that allows him to ultimately pass judgement on her cooking.

As the updated OXO advert’s use of the second approach suggests, however, a relatively uncomplicated restatement of this patriarchal gender dynamic may no longer be promotionally effective, particularly when the introduction of children has introduced multiple women into the same domestic arrangement. While the father’s deferral to the greater knowledge of his daughter does suggest that he is ill equipped to undertake domestic duties unsupervised, it is crucial that he both tries and, ultimately, succeeds. This combination of ineptitude coupled with the ability to learn serves to make the father arguably childlike, due to his need to be taught by those younger than him. Yet, developing Goffman’s analysis of the reasons behind this representation of fatherhood, he is also shown to be capable of overcoming his ineptitude to fulfil the role of a parent. At the end of the advert the daughter is also shown protecting the arguably childlike mother, who is helplessly weeping over the film she has chosen to watch instead of cooking the family dinner.

In this equalising of the parental and child relationships we see an echo of the generational power dynamics that underpinned situation comedies, both in the UK and the USA. Like the Keatons in *Family Ties*, or Alf Garnett’s tolerant, forward thinking son-in-law, the younger generation are shown to be both capable and controlled in the face of their parent’s emotional or practical inadequacies. This

dynamic also produces a greater parity between the competency of the mother and the father, of course, complicating Goffman's analysis of the motivation for the representation of fatherhood as childlike or ludicrous. In this case, the father's ability to overcome his natural ineptitude under supervision is not solely utilised so that "the competency image of real males could be preserved", but is clearly shown to be a desirable result of his increased comfort within the domestic sphere. While his ineptitude is played for laughs in a way that would suggest that Goffman's analysis could be applied to this text, the fact that the mother is also robbed of her competency suggests a movement towards a greater flexibility in the representation of both domestic masculinity and femininity.

The promotional benefits of this approach are obvious; by introducing this learning process for the father the advert is able to demonstrate the product in use. For a new product, such as the gravy granules advertised here, his incompetence can be used to substitute for the assumed female consumer's ignorance of the product while still maintaining female competence within the text. While Goffman's analysis suggests that this form of childlike masculinity flatters notions of masculine competency in the real world, it is also possible to argue that this approach flatters female competency within the domestic sphere by offering the father as a surrogate through which the consumer's ignorance of the product can be resolved. Equally, as is the case with this advert, the father's incompetence also serves to demonstrate the ease with which the product can be used; if the father, who is unaware even of the gravy's location can use the product to produce a passable meal, then the assumed female consumer can remain assured that the product will prove even more effective in their hands.

Where Goffman's analysis remains relevant is in the advert's attempt to square this suggestion of a potentially mutable domestic masculinity with the retention of a discursively familiar model of the patriarchal nuclear family that imbues the product or brand with a sense of comforting tradition. The marked difference between male and female domestic competence that pervades the text serves to ultimately reinstate a representation of an ultimately feminine domestic sphere, even as that representation is questioned by the presence of the masculine. It is not just the father's incompetence that serves this function, reasserting the notion of separate spheres of experience by demonstrating his unease within the domestic sphere, but also the fact that these roles are in the process of being reproduced in the next generation.

Alongside the daughter's supervision of her father's cooking and motherly comforting of her weeping parent, we also see the father's ignorance of the domestic sphere reproduced in his son. When the father comments that the gravy granules remind him of instant coffee and the son overhears him, he asks whether he can have a cup, demonstrating an equivalent ignorance of the product not shared by the daughter. It is also the son who comments that "it must be one of Dad's sprouts", when the daughter comments that the film has left her mother with a lump in her throat, to which the father jokingly responds, "More coffee, Jason?". At the very end of the advert humour is used to express the ultimate ludicrousness of masculine domestic competence and reinstate the traditional gender dynamics of the patriarchal nuclear family in defiance of their demonstrable flexibility throughout the advert.

As in the situation comedies analysed earlier, however, the very fact that the text has provided a space in which the flexibility of male and female roles within the nuclear model can be explored, while ultimately reinstating the 'traditional' model at

the end, demonstrates their role within the process of changing definitions of the nuclear family over time. As the evolution of the OXO family, from Katie and Philip to the more equitable arrangement of the 1990s partially demonstrates, the promotional necessity of providing a model of family life that is recognisable to the consumer forces advertisers to demonstrate awareness of the increasingly flexibility of roles within the family. Not only would the relationship dynamic of the 1950s advert seem anachronistic to the 1990s consumer, but also, as evidenced by the father's use of the product to mediate his ineptitude, a greater flexibility in the rigidity of gender roles can also be used as a metaphor for the consumption of the product advertised. Just as the figure of the father in situation comedy was used to explore the limits of representing the 'traditional' nuclear family on television, he performs a similar role in the advertising of domestic products.

Far from being a disadvantage for advertisers, an acknowledgement of this broader discursive tension between the myth of the nuclear family and the complex lived experiences of consumers can actually prove a promotional advantage. As the disparity between an outmoded model of patriarchy and the malicious or inept fathers of situation comedy motivated both the comedy and drama in many programmes, in advertising a similar disparity can be used to create a tension that can be resolved through consumption. Equally, as many situation comedies return the families they depict to the nuclear status quo at the end of each episode advertising also uses a restatement of these 'traditional' values for its own promotional ends. As with the OXO family father, who is shown to be both simultaneously capable and incapable within the domestic sphere, 'traditional' male and female roles are reinstated at the end of the advert by making the idea of a greater flexibility ultimately comical.

This approach fails to deliver on the promise of a greater discursive flexibility that the literal picturing of a male character undertaking domestic chores may well imply. Through making the father “childlike and ludicrous” this form of domestic advertising ultimately serves to recreate a discourse of masculinity that has a limited relationship to the domestic sphere. While Goffman reads this approach as bolstering the competency of real world males outside the domestic sphere, it is clearly not exclusively flattering. By removing a competent model of masculinity from the domestic sphere it does absolve men of the responsibility of domestic maintenance, and place that burden onto women. The consistent restatement of this model of nuclear family life, however, is limiting for both men and women, recreating the notion of domestic masculinity as ultimately problematic that pervades the discourse of the nuclear family. While the evolution of OXO’s advertising necessarily acknowledges shifts in this discourse, in order to remain promotionally effective, its ultimate restatement of this dominant discourse proves that it remains in thrall to the nuclear family model.

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“...a non-nuclear but very real family unit”: Representing Fatherhood and the Family in British Telecom’s *Adam* Series.

One particular series of advertisements, first appearing on British television in October 2005, is arguably the first to make an explicit attempt to move beyond the representations of family and fatherhood referenced in the adverts discussed previously. In an interview for the company’s website BT Group’s marketing and brand director, Tim Evans, discussed the overarching strategy of the *Adam* campaign:

We wanted to connect with people as strongly as some of our other great marketing campaigns of the past did...but in a way that's relevant to today's modern relationships. Adam is a guy in his mid-thirties, he's someone we all feel we could know. We put him in the centre of a wider network of people, a non-nuclear but very real family unit. (goliath.ecnext.com)

Analysing how far the campaign succeeds in this stated goal of connecting with the audience through the representation of a “non-nuclear but very real family unit”, and also where it fails, tells us a great deal about the changing nature of the intertwined discourses of family and fatherhood on British television, as well as alerting us to those elements that remain stubbornly unchanged.

Before we begin a discussion of the success, or otherwise, of BT's promotional abandonment of the nuclear family model, however, it is important to consider the reasons behind their embracing of the tensions inherent in much of family life. Arguably, BT have always benefited from subverting a more common, unified image of family life in their advertising in several ways. First, an acknowledgement of the “wider network” of family relationships, explicitly including those family members living apart from the domestic core of the nuclear family, allows them to exhibit the products they are promoting in use. As the key purpose of their telecommunications products are to mediate human relationships without the need for physical proximity, demonstrating their ability to connect family members living in different domestic situations, as they connected grandmother with grandson in the hugely popular series of adverts starring Maureen Lipman as “Beattie”, has regularly provided motivation for BT to look beyond the narrow confines of the core nuclear family. While it may serve OXO to remind its potential consumers of the product's place within those activities that traditionally bring the family together, such as Sunday lunch, explaining their advertising's desire to offer an idealised image of family unity, BT benefit from the common physical, if not emotional, distances

between family members. Consequently, it has long been necessary for them to acknowledge the potential stresses and tensions of family life rather more explicitly than many adverts, often treading a fine line between offering an image of family life that both resonates with, and appeals to, the viewer while also making reference to this potentially alienating distance. Despite the initial success of the 'Beattie' campaign, for instance, BT felt it necessary to end the series in 1992 because,

“...research showed that she [the character of Beattie] was having an effect opposite to that intended. Her character had become a parody of the person that many people want to avoid calling. Rather than being a role model, for some she was the opposite because she compounded a negative stereotype of the 'wasteful' woman chatting 'aimlessly' on the phone.” (Duckworth, 1997, p.164)

Here we can see how the arguable necessity of BT moving beyond the representation of a unified core of the nuclear family, and including an extended network of other relatives in order to demonstrate their products in use, must be handled delicately if their promotional messages are to sit easily amongst the more conservative, often idealised, representations of the family presented in the advertising for many others products. While consumers initially responded to the 'Beattie' series' depiction of a realistic problem, namely staying in touch with relatives outside the immediate domestic context, the series' explicit acknowledgement of the potential problems of contemporary family life eventually threatened to take the promotional shine off their proposed solution.

Of course, it is important to remember that presenting a more complex representation of family life, as shown in the previous discussion of the complexities implicit in even some of the most apparently uncomplicated representations of the nuclear family, is neither the sole preserve of the BT Group's marketing department, nor without its own potential promotional advantages. We have already discussed the commonly proposed theory that advertising often relies on the creation of a sense of

consumer anxiety brought about by a realisation of the gap between the consumer's own experience and the idealised representations that advertising presents them with. While this argument may be more obviously relevant to the promotion of luxury goods, bringing to mind the unattainable, airbrushed perfection of fashion photography or the action cinema aesthetics of car advertising, it has also long played a role in advertising some of the most blandly pedestrian of products. Just as the careful choices made about the contents and decor of Mary and Philip's kitchen attempted to place OXO within a heavily middle-class context that would imbue the product with at least some sense of luxury, it would prove rare, if not completely impossible to find an advert that relinquished all sense of aspiration for the gritty, working-class realism employed in some of the dramas that they interrupt.

Generally, however, adverts that represent domesticity and family relationships, as we have seen, are more inclined to draw their inspiration from situation comedy, a genre intimately associated with the portrayal of British family life, than the more confrontationally realist traditions of British television drama. The basic structure of the half hour sitcom, in which humour is often derived from the tensions between characters and the narrative often driven by an interruption, and consequent reinstatement, of the status quo, is often mirrored, in a heavily truncated fashion, by the adverts that surround it. While adverts can, and often do, use humour to diffuse the potential tensions that they represent on screen, they generally allow the product being advertised to play a role in any restoration of order at the end. In the case of the most successful entry in the 'Beattie' series, for example, Beattie is able to comfort her grandson on his disappointing exam results over the phone, reminding him that he is a 'scientist' because he 'got an 'ology', when it is revealed that he managed to pass Sociology. This advert, subsequently elevated to the status of a

‘classic’, neatly demonstrates the promotional advantages of representing the imperfections of family life. As with many of the families in the adverts discussed, BT’s extended families continue to exist somewhat outside of the aspirational lifestyle advertising utilised by those products generally considered as luxuries. In order to show the product in use, BT choose to base this particular advert around failure, rather than striving to associate their product with success or achievement. Instead they show how the product, at least partially, resolves the issue of failure by allowing the boy contact with his eternally encouraging grandmother. Even at the end, the advert shies away from implying a complete narrative resolution by undercutting its own message with humour. While Beattie is lovingly encouraging towards her grandson the viewer is aware that she is clutching at straws in her insistence that he has become a ‘scientist’ due to passing sociology (a subject of apparently limited worth according to the dismissive way in which the teenager relates his success in the field). While the advert shows the product’s ability to offer resolution in a time of stress, assuming that her grandson is at least partially cheered by Beattie’s unwavering encouragement, in order for the advert’s humour to be understood the viewer must acknowledge the incompleteness of this resolution. In this advert, BT make the modest claim that their product can offer comfort in the event of failure rather than allowing the consumer to live in a fantasy world in which such failure no longer exists. In this way they hope to resonate with the lived experience of the viewer, who should come away aware of how the product could fit into their equally complicated lives.

While there is arguably still an aspirational thrust to these advertising narratives (after all, a resolution, however compromised, is almost always reached) without an acknowledgement of the potential problem it is impossible for the advert

to offer its product as a solution. As with the advertising of many products that are designed for use within the apparently unglamorous domestic sphere, tensions must be included and, as we have seen, this ensures that advertising's treatment of the family has always relied on balancing this requirement for a type of realism and the need to place their product in an appealing context. In contrast to the advertising of mobile phones, for example, where the prevalent use of fantasy and the prioritisation of style generally reflects a desire to present the product as playing a central role in the creation of a distinct individuality through consumption, BT continue to rely on an acknowledgement of the imperfect nature of family life when advertising products for use in the home, despite both products essentially performing the same technical function.

As the initial success and eventual ineffectiveness of the 'Beattie' series demonstrates, however, there are both advantages and disadvantages to attempting this delicate balance between realism and fantasy. Apart from the need to acknowledge the potential 'problem' to which your product is the 'solution', in order to demonstrate what your product does on a practical level, there seems to be an accepted logic running through advertising based around a representation of family life that the advert must resonate with both the lived experience of the viewer, and the broader discourse on family life. As we saw in the discussion of the creation of the *Katie* series for OXO, from the very earliest days of television advertising in the UK a conscious decision was made to move away from the "girl in the fantasy kitchen" (Pearson and Turner, 1966, p.58) towards a more balanced representation, somewhere between realism and aspiration. This approach arguably goes some way towards inoculating these adverts against the charge that they make unrealistic claims for their products, potentially key when presenting products that are designed with practicality

and necessity in mind. This approach creates a sense that the advert is essentially 'honest' about the product, backing up the claims made about the product by instilling the advert with an overall sense of veracity.

Move too far away from attempting to alert the viewer to the positive aspects the product could bring to their lives, however, and you risk offering them little to no reason to select your product over any other. The inherent conservatism of the dominance of the coherent ideal of the nuclear family in advertising, despite an increased awareness of the plurality of family types in wider society, could potentially be explained as an attempt to make an appeal to the perceived discursive notion of the nuclear model as the 'correct' model of family life; thus implicitly associating your product with a sense that it plays a role in the creation and maintenance of this comforting coherence. Equally, the tensions consistently undermining the unit in many adverts often not only provide the humour that potentially entertains the viewer but, simultaneously, implicitly acknowledge the potentially unrealistic nature of this unchanging model of family life that they are presenting.

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Signs of Progress: Comparing Domestic and Non-Domestic Masculinities

This persistent tension between the comforting discursive coherence of the nuclear family and an increasing plurality in both the lived experience and the wider discourse of family life, explains BT's desire to attempt to reflect this change in their own advertising. As we have seen in our discussion of previous advertising trends, the tensions that have proven to be inherent in the representation of family life, and that have often best been reflected in the often complex position of the father, suggest

that the *Adam* series, with its explicit depiction of the non-nuclear family, could be read as the logical conclusion to the continuing process of the erosion of the nuclear family model's discursive power. That we can easily identify the retention of key tropes that we have seen recurring throughout the history of the family in British advertising suggests that the series forms part of an ongoing process rather than a radical discursive break. By analysing what is different and what remains the same, however, the *Adam* series can serve as a useful indicator of core ideas that have informed the representation of family, and the father's place within it, from the inception of British television advertising to the present day, as well as providing a indication of possible new directions.

That the series aspires to present something of a break from previous representations of family life, striving to demonstrate a complex, "very real" family unit, is apparent from the opening scene of the very first advert, entitled *Helping Out* (Aired: 24/10/05). Adam/Kris Marshall is seated in a large, leather armchair with his laptop in hand. This scene of peaceful domesticity is swiftly shattered by Adam's discovery of a squeaky, pink child's toy beneath his buttocks, a sense of Adam's physical awkwardness in his own domestic surroundings included to mirror the emotional awkwardness that his complex familial relationships can engender. This is a trope that recurs several times throughout the series; including later in this first advert as he stumbles over more toys, and even forms the basis for another entry in the series in which he complains that the "kids have taken over".

A sense of confusion and lack of control is also alluded to by his introductory voiceover, as well as the advert's mixture of aesthetic styles: "Hi. I'm Adam and I'm 35. I'm not so sure about everything else. I've met a girl who's now my girlfriend...well, not a girl exactly. She's a grown woman with two kids". The mis-

en-scene at first appears to be striving for a sense of realism, with naturalistic lighting and handheld camera movements suggestive of documentary techniques, but the conversationally confessional tone of the voiceover offers a simultaneous narrative of romantic comedy. We are shown the first meeting of Adam and his girlfriend Jane/Esther Hall, a knowingly clichéd chance encounter in a lift, a setting allowing for the apparently diegetic inclusion of schmaltzy ‘elevator music’, but this soundtrack continues to play as the advert cuts to the couple gazing lovingly into each other’s eyes across a café table.

This romantic scene, along with accompanying soundtrack, is abruptly interrupted, however, by the reveal of the woman’s two children seated at the table beside them. The advert uses a fusion of comedy and realism in its well-timed undercutting of the romantic comedy narrative to suggest a degree of knowingness akin to that of the assumed ‘fifth phase’ viewer; a visual gag that says “we know real life isn’t like the movies”. The technique recurs at the end of the advert when Adam’s attempts to recreate a romantic atmosphere, reinserting the original soundtrack into the diegetic world of the advert by downloading it to his laptop, are once again thwarted by the presence of one of Jane’s children.

The advert continues to attempt to undermine the more conventional elements of its earlier scenes by exhibiting a sense of the complexity of familial relations, obviously intended as the unique selling point of this series. Following the reveal of the children is a close-up of a toothbrush holder housing four, deliberately distinctive, toothbrushes. Again a shaky, handheld style implies a sense of realism and intimacy more akin to a documentary or even a home movie. This parade of toothbrushes further alerts us to the delicate balance between advertising convention and attempted realism, however, in its implicit echoing of the traditional nuclear family model.

Arranged in descending size order left to right, the large, dark ‘father’ toothbrush, with its bristles facing right, surveys the family line-up of the colourful and elaborate ‘mother’ and ‘daughter’ brushes, with the non-descript, translucent ‘son’ brush sandwiched between them. The three smaller brushes all face forwards. Adam’s voiceover undercuts this sense of conventional domesticity, “I’m pretty sure they’ve all moved in with me”. In a single shot this advert has managed to find a highly economical solution to the problem of outlining the different units within this particular family that, we shall see, recur throughout the series. The mother and children’s brushes are grouped as a unit, all facing the same direction, with Adam’s brush separated by its side-on position within the shot, while the male and female brushes are distinguished by their comparative levels of colourfulness. Already we can see the theme of the complex make-up of the contemporary family being introduced, with even the family’s toothbrushes exhibiting clearly delineated units organised along biological relation or gender distinctions.

Yet this series will clearly not be immune to the established dominance of the nuclear family in television advertising. As the shot of the family toothbrushes makes clear, this “non-nuclear but very real family unit” bears a striking resemblance in its own make-up to the more nuclear family unit familiar to the viewer from countless other adverts. Erving Goffman suggests that the nuclear family is the most common form of family unit depicted in advertising not only because of its culturally privileged position as an apparent societal norm but also because, “one finds that the allocation of at least one girl and at least one boy ensures that the symbolization of the full set of intrafamily relations can be effected” (1979, p. 37). In *Helping Out* we find that the allocation of one boy and one girl is used in exactly the manner suggested by Goffman. The complexities of Adam’s relationship to his girlfriend’s children are

given a gendered dimension when he uses his Internet access (the BT product being promoted in this particular advert) to help them with their homework. Adam sees that the girl is struggling and offers her the help she needs, which she accepts gratefully, rewarding him with an unexpected and slightly awkward hug. The boy, on the other hand, maintains a more wary demeanour insisting that his homework is going “alright” when he is clearly using the time to read comics instead. This moment of tension is soon dissipated by Adam’s faithful laptop and its access to the information resource of the Internet, allowing the boy to finish his homework while Adam lies on his bed reading the discarded comic book. When he is finished, however, we are presented with another moment of confused tension when Adam attempts to hug him while the boy offers a simple handshake.

Adam’s voiceover aligns his character with those of the children (“somehow I’m back doing homework again...I’m learning a lot”) but his actions are that of a conventional father figure (assisting them with their homework, administering physical encouragement and comfort). In this first advert we see the anxious confusion of roles that will characterize Adam throughout the series. Be it agonising over a best man speech that ends up becoming totally inappropriate and poorly received (interestingly Jane’s son is the only other person at the wedding who finds the bawdy humour hilarious) or clumsily attempting to extricate himself from a flirtatious encounter at a party, once again we see how Adam, as the family’s father figure, is utilised as the personification of the complex interpersonal relationships that encompass all the characters. While Jane drifts through the adverts as a background character, whose parental responsibilities are usually met with a serene grin, the adverts choose to focus on Adam’s sense of confusion to provide not only the comedy but also the sense of the “very real” complexity of contemporary family relationships.

The fourth advert in the series, *Kid's Toys* (Aired: 06/02/06), recalls the first in its resurrection of the trope of Adam's physical discomfort within the domestic sphere. The advert opens with a close-up shot of Adam's feet picking their way through the assorted debris of children's toys littering the floor of his home. We see the rotor blade of a toy helicopter set spinning as he stumbles into it, suggesting a giant stomping destructively through a miniature world. The implication is obvious; his home now primarily belongs to the children and he is the one who must watch his step. This is evidenced by the next shot in which Adam watches helplessly from the background as his de facto stepdaughter selects a doll's house and a doll and leaves the room, leaving a toy-covered floor behind her. His voiceover reaffirms Adam's sense of passivity within his own home; "The kids seem to have taken over". Even though the advert allows the primary blame for the state of the house to be laid at the girl's feet it simultaneously represents her as someone in the process of learning a "natural" feminine desire to take care of the domestic sphere (represented by the doll's house) and to fulfil a motherly role (represented by the doll). This complication of traditional gender roles is mirrored by Adam's concern for the cleanliness of the house, traditionally a female responsibility, and Jane's casual response to his foiled attempts to clean up later in the advert.

In Adam's response to the mess that has taken over his house we see the tension between the traditional gender roles that the advert uses to make the characters recognisable to its audience and the more complex, apparently realistic, flexibility of gender roles exhibited by this contemporary family unit. Adam takes what could be characterised as a typically masculine approach to the problem of mess, using the Phone Book (the product advertised) to find the most effective solution to the problem. We are shown a fantasy sequence based on his first response, which is to hire a skip

and simply dispose of all the toys. He decides against this course of action reasoning that the children “would never forgive” him. Here we see Adam maturing, developing the ability to reject his initial selfish response and choose a more nurturing path. Eventually we see the solution that Adam does settle on, a far more practical pair of hanging storage devices in which he has placed all the children’s toys ready for their arrival home. His good work is immediately, and literally, undone, however, by the daughter, who empties her storage unit onto the floor to retrieve her favourite cuddly toy. As the unit is emptied we are shown a shot of the toys falling around Adam’s feet, echoing the opening shot of the advert and suggesting Adam’s inability to influence his domestic situation as his home returns to its original, disorganised state. The dispirited look on his face is juxtaposed by a shot of Jane, wry smile in place, demonstrating her placid amusement at Adam’s failure to resolve the issue. In fact, the only family member to share a look of sympathy with Adam is the son, yet this is short lived as he turns and follows his mother through the doorway. The final shot is of Adam staring forlornly at his feet as the female voiceover suggest, “there are now more ways to find what you’re looking for with the Phone Book from BT”.

Throughout these two adverts we can see that several, now familiar, features of the representation of fatherhood in advertising are both presented and subverted. There is a tension between the intentions of Adam and his ability to actually resolve the issue at hand. A “ludicrous” and “childlike” masculinity, as identified in Goffman’s analysis of print advertising, is hinted at throughout, with Adam’s physical awkwardness rendering him a humorous figure and his fantasy response of disposing of all the child’s toys in a skip hinting at a childlike selfishness. These elements are mediated, however, by his mature approach to the traditionally feminine task of cleaning. In Adam’s lack of success we are shown his inability to overcome the limitations of a

seemingly gendered ability to resolve domestic issues, with Jane's knowing glance at the end of the advert suggesting that he performs these tasks ultimately under her scrutiny and that, even if she does not perform the role in this particular advert, she is imbued with an innate ability to perform these tasks more successfully and to judge the success of Adam's attempt accordingly. As this demonstrates, it is possible to provide a traditional reading of this advert that presents a series of gender representations that would seem consistent with Goffman's thirty-year-old analysis.

The point at which this series differs from these traditional representations, however, is the point at which these gender roles are shown to be problematic. While Adam is, on the surface, inadequate to the task of negotiating the difficulties of family and domestic life, it is crucial to the series that he continues to try. By focusing on Adam as the central character at the heart of the series, the eponymous hero, the focus shifts from a coherent family arrangement to the interloper who must construct his own place within it. Retaining elements of more traditional representations of masculinity within a domestic context serves to show how Adam is attempting to move beyond this rigid identity (usually with the help of a BT product) and is taking part in the sort of identity construction through consumption long familiar from advertising's forms of address to women. The comic elements of the adverts are created through the use of this previous model of incompetent masculinity, an ironic comment on its stereotypical nature, while the realist aesthetic underlines the fact that Adam is a more complete, realistic human being with concerns, abilities and intentions beyond the traditional advertising stereotype.

This dialectic between the old and new forms of advertising masculinity is made explicit in a later advert, *Daddy Visits* (Aired: 06/01/07), when the children's biological father comes to take them away for a weekend. The advert begins with

Adam and the little girl in her bedroom. Adam is fixing something, demonstrating that he has reached a higher level of integration within the family unit by placing him within a hyper-feminine part of the, already predominantly feminine, domestic sphere (the room is, of course, decorated almost entirely in pink) and by his undertaking of the fathering duties of home maintenance. We hear the sound of a car drawing up on the gravel drive outside, followed by a point of view shot (presumably from the little girl's window) of a convertible BMW. The choice of car shows the advert's desire to contrast its own approach with alternative advertising approaches relying on the representation of a desirable lifestyle. A luxury car, like a BMW, would more traditionally signify a lifestyle of economic prosperity to which the consumer should aspire. In this advert, however, the ostentatious flashiness of the vehicle, and the viewer's awareness of who is driving it, suggest the clichéd mid-life crisis purchase made in an effort to regain a lost youth, an aspirational use of technology returned to later in the advert and presented as an unflattering personality trait. The car's appearance does manage to elicit a squeal of, "Daddy!" from the little girl, however, as she runs down the stairs to greet her father. This excitement is undercut immediately by a shot of Jane passing Adam in the hallway, on her way to open the door for her ex-husband. As she passes him she pointedly instructs him to "Be nice!", the implication being that, from what Adam has heard about the children's biological father, "nice" is the last thing he could expect. Once again the complex nature of the family network as removed from the concrete certainties of biological relationship are made explicit, with Adam, Jane and even the son all demonstrating reservations about the father, while the only person who is unreservedly impressed by the man, who we soon find to be a walking bastion of outmoded patriarchy, is the family's youngest member.

The advert goes on to make the tension between both old and new forms of domestic masculinity and old and new advertising approaches more explicit as the action cuts to the kitchen, where Adam and the children's father are enjoying a cup of tea. Stood side by side, the image of the two father figures could not be more clearly demarcated. The biological father stands stiffly against the kitchen work surface. His rugged stubble and creased leather jacket, which he keeps on throughout his visit, contrasting with Adam's casual dress and demeanour. While the first demonstrates more of the traditional markers of masculinity it is obvious which one belongs within the domestic sphere and, therefore, which is the image of masculinity the consumer should be aspiring to in this particular advertising context. When Adam compliments him on his watch it serves to consolidate the impression that the father seems to have walked in from a different advert altogether. In response to Adam's "Nice watch", the father proceeds to list its technical features; "Yeah. Titanium. You can dive to 1,000 feet". The rapid cutting between reaction shots of Adam and the son demonstrate that they are aware what is taking place; the father is using the luxury consumer product in an attempt to prove his manliness and to intimidate Adam. What is less clear is how Adam reacts to this competitiveness. While a reaction shot shows Adam turning his gaze towards the floor it is ambiguous as to whether he is chastened by the father's show of masculinity or embarrassed for him and unwillingly to enter into the posturing.

As the advert progresses the latter seems more likely as it relies on the father noticing the BT Home Hub installed on the kitchen table before Adam can demonstrate his own technological know-how. Even then, it is the son who effectively takes Adam's side, listing the advantages of the product and, unknowingly, humbling his father's attempts to intimidate Adam. The advert plays on clichéd notions of masculine

intimacy by using a technological product to mediate the relationships between men. As far as the son seems to be concerned he is entering a bonding discourse over a common topic of conversation between men. He even suggests to his father, “we can chat for hours over the internet”. The fact that he inadvertently deflates his father’s posturing is where this discourse of masculine bonding becomes more complex. The Home Hub itself is shown nestling comfortably between a cereal box and a half-finished glass of orange juice, demonstrating its integrated place within the domestic life of the family. Unlike the watch that hypothetically allows the father to “dive to 1,000 feet”, the Home Hub’s technological advantages are for use within the domestic sphere and thus more likely to be useful to the consumer. Unlike the advertising rhetoric that the father regurgitates, the advert suggests that the claims made of the Home Hub are more humble yet, crucially, realistic and useful. Thus the advert not only becomes a narrative about conflicting forms of masculine identity but also a meta-narrative about different methods of advertising.

By the end of the advert it is clear which form of masculinity, and consequently which form of advertising technique, the consumer is encouraged to favour. As the father is leaving the house Jane hands him a container, accompanied by a pointed, but silent, exchange of glances. Once again we see that the mother has ultimate responsibility for the smooth running of the household as she has obviously been busy preparing some essential element of the children’s weekend visit while the men have stood around drinking tea. The pointed glance she shares with her ex-husband manages to convey the idea that he has no place in the domestic arrangement that she has created. He accepts this, quickly walking towards the door and not looking back. The son, who is following him out of the house looks back and exchanges a glance with Adam who winks at him. Here fatherhood becomes a battleground in the formation of

different masculine identities, with the son caught between his ultra-masculine father and the more domesticated masculinity of Adam. Adam's wink conveys not only that the son also has a place within the domestic set-up, to which he can return, but extends the sense of easy security that allowed him to sit out the macho posturing earlier in the advert. The female voiceover also enters into this dialectic between the two masculine formations suggesting that the Home Hub is a "more complete broadband package", just as the man who favours it could be said to present a more 'complete' notion of masculinity that includes an easy domesticity.

After the trials and tribulations of the earlier adverts, Adam has begun to earn his place within the domestic sphere and his adoption of the Home Hub imbues the product with a similar sense of easy utility. Conversely the father's more loaded use of technology as a tool for identity formation is undermined by his discomfort in the domestic space in which the narrative of the advert plays out. The viewer is presented with two versions of masculinity and two versions of promotion, which they are asked to choose between. Of course the choice that the advertisers want us to make is heavily underlined by the advert's final scene, Adam and Jane waving goodbye on the doorstep accompanied by Adam's sardonic suggestion that "He seems nice", which is unequivocally shot down by Jane's no-nonsense "He's not". Adam's masculinity is more at ease within the domestic sphere and he is presented as a more attentive and capable father than the children's biological father, the more "complete package". This shift from a biological formation of family to what Beck-Gernsheim terms "elective affinities" (1998, p.1) not only reflects real social changes in the formation of family and home life but is also used to imbue the product with a sense of authenticity. Unlike the overblown, impractical rhetoric of the 1,000 feet dive, regurgitated faithfully by Jane's ex-husband, the advert makes only practical claims for the product it promotes.

Thus, just as Jane has elected to trade in a form of outmoded masculinity for one with a more flexible attitude to domestic and family issues, the viewer is ostensibly offered the chance to trade in the older form of advertising, with its wild claims and attractive yet unattainable lifestyles, for one that suggests it will simply tell you the truth, not only about the product itself, but also about the consumer's life.

The inclusion of the biological father allows the advertisers to distinguish the main character from a form of masculinity usually figured, in contemporary advertising, as ineffective or incompetent. The humiliation of the biological father at the hands of his own family is reminiscent of numerous examples of less subtle advertising in which the father, when represented within the primarily feminine space of the domestic sphere, is shown to be ill at ease at best and outright humiliated at worst.

This trend towards making the father a foolish figure in adverts is a complex expression of both the ability and desire of advertising to respond to changes within the discourse of fatherhood and the industry's naturally conservative impulse. As we saw in Goffman's analysis, theorists have recognised a trend towards including the father only as a figure of fun in advertising at least as far back as the 1960s. Lynn Spigel, in a discussion of the print advertising for home entertainment systems, identifies a "lazy" male spectator as the most pictured character, before suggesting a shift in tone at some point in the 1960s when,

“...representations of lazy male spectators sometimes took on sinister tones. In these cases, the male spectator was not simply represented as lazy lounge [an understandable characterisation since it represents the product in use]; instead he was shown to be thoroughly humiliated and degraded.” (Spigel, 2001b, p.397)

Just as Goffman's analysis suggests that the depiction of men as “unrealistically” childlike could function in such a way as to separate the representation from the real,

“as if perhaps in making him candidly unreal the competency image of real males could be preserved” (1979, p. 36), it is possible to read the many unflattering representations of men within the domestic sphere in contemporary adverts, including the *Adam* series, as providing an ironically humorous function. There is an absurdity to the traditional head of the household being told what type of bread he can eat, or, in Adam’s more realistic case, his confusion over who lives in his house and, to some extent, Goffman’s analysis can account for this use of humour.

This reading is complicated, however, by the central place that fathers continue to hold in these advertising narratives. From the beginning of the series Adam is shown to be the main character; almost all the adverts are accompanied by his voiceover and he is the most rounded of the characters, being shown at home, at work and in the outside world. While his authority is questioned by his unease within the domestic sphere we are also shown Adam overcoming these challenges to become a more integrated member of a new family unit. The fact that these character developments are the source of comedy, as in the case of the misjudged hugs in the first advert, provides a double function in the adverts; firstly, it undermines the authority invested in his character through his narrative centrality and allows a wider range of consumers to identify with the adverts through a critique of the central character, and, secondly, it retains the common advertising trope of an incompetent masculinity which acts as a buffer against a representation of patriarchal masculinity. If it is possible for Adam’s attempts to place himself in a fatherly role to be played for laughs it suggests that the whole process of nurturing and family life are outside any intrinsic notions of masculinity and must be learnt through a lengthy, confusing and potentially humorous process. In this way, while the traditional authority of a patriarchal masculinity is ostensibly questioned through an unflattering

representation of the same it could be argued that the adverts serve to bolster a traditional gender divide; with the ludicrousness of a domestic masculinity absolving men from domestic responsibility and placing all the burden on the female, albeit implicitly, through the more common positive representation of a capable femininity.

While this reading is useful for understanding the way in which advertising attempts to speak to both women and men while also reflecting a culturally conservative gender hierarchy, it fails to take into account advertising's ability, desire and need to adapt during a period of comprehensive social change. Wernick's suggestion that "To look at how post-1960s advertising has dealt with gender is evidently a strategic point of entry into the way in which it has come to represent, and reconfigure the ideological world as a whole" (1991, p.26) demonstrates that relations between gender identities is one aspect of the "ideological world" that has been visibly restructured during the last half a century. To suggest that humorously incompetent representations of masculinity serve *only*, in the final analysis, to maintain a coherent patriarchal masculine identity ignores the social realities of significant, broader changes in the make-up of the family unit. As outlined at the beginning of this study, the most common form of advertising chooses to attempt to represent the consumer's reality in a recognisable way so that the message of the advert (buy this product) is most likely to be understood. As patriarchal authority is gradually eroded (a process that the continuing prevalence of the nuclear family in television advertising proves is still a very long way from completion) a tension has arisen between the more traditional approach of presenting an idealised image of the family and the need to present a more realistic image to connect with consumers. The popular image of the incompetent father is an attempt to reconcile these two positions.

He is a complex simpleton created to mock the family member most commonly perceived as the mythic figurehead of the nuclear family, the patriarchal father, and to correspond with the rhetoric of personal liberation often used in marketing to women by presenting him as a flattering comparison, and to simultaneously imbue the advert with a hint of postmodern identity politics by mocking the very idea of a coherent gender identity through constant demonstrations of his cartoonish nature. One thing he does not seem to be designed to do particularly well, apart from the scant consolation that his epic incompetence may, just may, suggest a flattering comparison with the competency of real men, is speak to male consumers. This is why the foolish father is usually, although by no means exclusively, confined to the advertising of those products which are predominantly consumed within the feminine domestic sphere and, thus, most likely, at least in the advertiser's estimation, to be purchased by women.

This is where the approach taken by this particular series of BT adverts proves to be something of a landmark. By attempting to represent a more realistic version of 21st century family life BT are attempting to appeal to all consumers. They include tropes familiar from common representations of the domestic sphere but an alternative model of masculinity is also offered. As the flattering comparison with the biological father in this series clearly demonstrated, a form of masculinity that can be comfortably accommodated within the domestic sphere is shown to be a highly desirable possibility. In this advert, Adam transcends the foolish father role he inhabits through many of the other adverts to provide a counterpoint to an even more foolish father who is so out of place in the domestic sphere that he is treated with contempt. The biological father's visit is the logical conclusion of the series' claim to authenticity with the advert positing a choice of masculine identities. In this advert

the father personifies not just the real-life social aspects of absent fatherhood, or, on the mythic level, a critique of the idea of patriarchal authority but also personifies the primacy of individual choice within a consumer culture. The audience is offered a choice between an outmoded masculinity, which has no place within the domestic sphere, or Adam's, admittedly clumsy, attempts to construct a coherent masculinity that does have a place within the family home. Just as the father personifies the rigid limits of a traditional masculine identity, Adam personifies the fluidity of modern identity politics, in which both gender and family roles are flexible and can be constructed through choice and, crucially, consumption.

What is clear is that BT's successful, but risky, strategy of breaking away from the traditional nuclear family in this series was not motivated by an important social agenda, but done purely for promotional effectiveness. They have created a series of adverts that are situated firmly at the point where more traditional advertising techniques of product information and the promotion of aspirational lifestyles meets the ironic self-knowledge of a postmodern industry. By attempting to show the British family in a more realistic, flexible representation they imbue the adverts themselves with an authenticity that is increasingly hard to transmit to an audience of consumers with an intimate knowledge of the codes and techniques of advertising. By showing a "new" (in advertising terms) formation of the family BT are intrinsically suggesting that they are demonstrating a new form of advertising, one which attempts to tell the truth about the make-up of contemporary family and one that can therefore be trusted to tell the truth about the product it promotes. Far from being a hard sell the step-family set-up of the BT adverts show it to be a unit of social organisation well suited to the task of promotion. By demonstrating a masculine identity that is not intrinsically suited to the domestic sphere but can be shaped to find

its place within it, the advert offers both a representation of masculinity that is recognisable and yet crucially implies a strong element of choice in the creation of this gendered identity. The rhetoric of choice also extends to Jane and the children, who must choose whether to accept Adam or regress to the outmoded masculinity of the biological father. The fact that the advert makes it clear which is the ‘right’ choice demonstrates not only an awareness of the real world flexibility of family forms but also a canny knowledge that the “elective affinities” of the contemporary family, with the prioritising of choice over biological relation, can provide a useful metaphor for the consumption of goods and services. In this series the two have become indistinguishable, with the products advertised playing a clear role in connecting the points of the non-nuclear family network, and in doing so, allowing Adam to construct a masculine identity that, while not a world away from the foolish fathers of a more simplistic advertising approach, at least allows for the concept of a flexible gender identity that can, eventually, be shaped to fit the round hole in the domestic sphere that most advertising fathers are just too square to fit.

Conclusion

By reshaping the alternative family form presented in the *Adam* series into something more comfortably nuclear, these adverts ultimately risk replicating the existing discourse of the family that figures fatherhood as either absent or problematic.

As analysis of the broader discourse of the nuclear family, and specific analysis of the father within it, it becomes clear that fatherhood within this particular family structure has long been unsure. As we have seen, the discursive quantification of the nuclear model at a specific point in history at which the economic and domestic spheres were broadly becoming separated created a discourse of separate, gendered spheres that defined the domestic, the sphere with which family life is intricately associated, as feminine. This led to a movement away from the notion of masculinity as intimately integrated with the domestic that John Tosh (1999) suggests characterised the Victorian era. This shift was perhaps best exemplified by the psychoanalytic work of Freud and those that followed him, as it shifted the focus from the father as having a key parenting role based on responsibility and care to having a symbolic function based primarily on his separation from the domestic sphere.

Tosh's assertion that the prevalent discourse of domestic masculinity in the Victorian era in fact signalled the climax of this form of fatherhood rather than its consolidation offers an interesting parallel with an analysis of the nuclear family's dominance during the 20th century. Rather than suggesting that this discursive prevalence in fact bolstered an uncomplicated notion of domestic masculinity, Tosh instead suggests that the amount of discussion surrounding the topic reflects a period of anxiety in which this concept was in flux. Similarly, while it is possible to identify an increasingly regulatory discourse of the nuclear family model, as exemplified in

the burgeoning attention paid to the form in the humanities in the first half on the 20th century, as in the work of influential but narrowly focused work of Talcott Parsons, it simultaneously opens up potential discussion of the ways in which families may deviate from this form.

In this, we return to Michel Foucault's "repressive hypothesis", which forms the starting point of his analysis of the similarly gendered discourse of sexuality. Foucault's focus on the relationship between power and discourse questions the way in which such regulatory discourses function. By broadening out his notion of discourse to include all of the voices that are applicable to his subject, and through analysing the power relationships between each, Foucault draws some conclusions that can be usefully applied to the discourse of the nuclear family.

Identifying a "discursive explosion" surrounding sex and sexuality in the 18th and 19th centuries, Foucault argues that this produced two corresponding effects:

First, a centrifugal movement with respect to heterosexual monogamy. Of course, the array of practices and pleasures continued to be referred to it as their internal standard; but it was spoken of less and less, or in any case with a growing moderation....It tended to function as a norm, one that was stricter, perhaps, but quieter. On the other hand, what came under scrutiny was the sexuality of children, mad men and women....It was time for all these figures, scarcely noticed in the past, to step forward and speak, to make the difficult confession of what they were. No doubt they were condemned all the same; but they were listened to; and if regular sexuality happened to be questioned once again, it was through a reflux movement, originating in these peripheral sexualities. (39)

The proliferation of theoretical and social challenges to the nuclear family that occurred throughout the latter half of the 20th century attest to a similar dual process taking place in the discourse of the family. While the model was, and continues to be, held up as the broad norm of family life, ever greater attention has been focused on both deviations from this norm and the inequalities within the

model itself, leading to the questioning of what Foucault might term the 'regular' family through an exploration of its periphery.

As we saw in a discussion of the complex position of masculinity, as a broader collation of identities and subjectivities, the study of which has slowly but steadily increased in visibility within the academy, feminist challenges to the patriarchal structure of our society, from which these debates extend, turned to the nuclear family as a primary cause of this structure. By focusing on those previously silent figures that disrupt the assumed coherence of the nuclear model, such as Betty Friedan's dissatisfied housewife suffering from the 'Problem With No Name' (Freidan, 1963), this contributed to a shift away from the family as a desirable norm. Instead, an alternative conception of the nuclear model arose that suggested a potentially repressive, regulatory discourse of family life that quite possibly fails to provide an accurate picture of the plurality of models in existence, or even, necessarily, personal satisfaction for those who do achieve it.

As the constructed nature of this model, and the way that it reproduced itself through the gendered processes of parenting, as argued by Chodorow (1978), Rich (1977) and Dinnerstein (1991), became accepted within the academy a greater diversity of family forms began to be recognised in the broader discourse of the family. The increasing acknowledgement of 'alternative' family forms was accompanied by a rhetoric of 'crisis' (Gordon, 1972) within, or the 'death' (Cooper, 1972) of, the nuclear model, which both echoed, and contributed to, the growth of a similar rhetorical movement regarding the interlinked concepts of masculinity (Bendarik, 1970), marriage (Storkey, 1996) and childhood (Scruton, 1997). If any 'crisis' is indeed revealed by this discursive movement, of course, it is only a crisis in the previously dominant models of these aspects within discourse. The 'crisis' in the

nuclear family, and suggestions of what can be done to avert this ‘crisis’, can become mired in debates about a return to these ‘traditional family values’. To do this is to contribute to the nuclear model as an ‘ideal’ of family, however, which it is apparent from analysis of the creation and dissemination of the form, is based on a discursive coherence that has always been in question from the point at which this model was defined. In fact, what this ‘crisis’ reveals is the conclusion of the reverse discursive process which has undermined the nuclear model through enshrining it a universal marker through which deviation from this ‘norm’ is understood. As the presence of deviation is increasingly acknowledged, however, these ‘peripheral’ forms question these claims to universality, ironically ensuring that the legitimacy of the nuclear model is questioned even as it continues to provide a united concept of ‘family’ through which these alternatives are understood.

As evidenced in the discussion of television texts from as early as the 1950s, the apparent high-watermark of the nuclear family’s demographic and discursive dominance, the centrality of this model in popular culture also allowed the peripheries of the form to be explored in popular culture as well as in academia. While *Father Knows Best* may revolve around the normality of the patriarchal nuclear form, it still created a comedic space in which challenges to its normality had to be negotiated, even if they were summarily rejected. In this sense, even the apparently exemplary representations of the nuclear family on television allowed for challenges to this model to become spoken rather than remain unspoken.

The “reflux movement” that Foucault identifies as a result of this process has also been evident in both the steadily increasing plurality of alternative family forms represented on television and the dramatisation of the internal debates surrounding the form that structure the narratives in which many television families are involved. As

the complex, shifting power arrangements which evidently structure the domestic sphere for the original OXO couple, Katie and Philip, suggest, even those texts that may benefit from appealing to the coherence of this cultural norm are forced to respond to the challenges to the coherence of this patriarchal model that placing men within a female dominated sphere invariably inspires.

The fact that so many of the tensions surrounding the coherence of the nuclear family are factored into the discourse through the figure of the father once again demonstrates this “reflux movement” in action. The primary cultural site of the enactment of the family is the domestic sphere, which is also primarily defined as a feminine space within a nuclear model that assumes a separation of spheres of experience along gendered lines. Within this dominant discourse, therefore, domestic masculinity potentially becomes a Foucauldian “peripheral figure”, silent due his assumed absence. Yet, as in Foucault’s reading of the increased attention paid to these peripheral figures in discourse, it is immediately complicated both by the fact that the nuclear family has often been assumed to play a key role in the maintenance of patriarchal power and the practical fact that the representations of fatherhood analysed above tend to factor him into the discourse as a figure who is anything but silent.

It is this tension between the assumption of the dominance of the patriarchal male, bolstered by the nuclear family and reliant on the father’s absence, and the actual representation of the processes of fathers and fathering in the female-dominated domestic sphere that predominantly defines the representation of fatherhood on television. Michael Kimmel discusses the difficulty of effectively talking about a dominant masculinity that relies on its unspoken nature, suggesting that it is its “superordinate” nature that can effectively render him invisible:

“...the superordinate is usually hypervisible as an individual; indeed to be a straight white man is to embody exactly what an “individual” is. As a result, one is invisible as a member of a group; one rarely considers race, gender or sexuality if you are a member of the dominant group.” (2005, p.x)

It is the disparity between the superordinate nature of this form of patriarchal masculinity and its subordinate nature within the traditionally female-dominated domestic sphere that accounts for fatherhood’s particular ability to successfully represent the tensions surrounding the nuclear family.

By placing the father into a domestic sphere from which he is traditionally discursively excluded he adopts the role of a peripheral figure, questioning the assumptions underpinning this discourse. Yet his ‘superordinate’ position within the meta-discourse of the nuclear family, removed from the specific site of the domestic, must also be accounted for. It is this combination of simultaneously existing within the discourse as both ‘sub’- and ‘superordinate’, as both presence and absence, which often allows the figure of the father to be represented as the conflation of both the symbolic and literal. It is this confusion between the two that allows the father to be consistently represented as a figure of mockery within the domestic sphere, offering a critique of his mythological position while also maintaining the suggestion that this mockery may possibly maintain his powerful position outside the home while making his subordination within it humorous (Goffman, 1979, p.36).

Zoja (2001) and Dermott (2008) both identify fatherhood as occupying a potentially ‘paradoxical’ position within discourse based on this confusion between the symbolic aspects of ‘fatherhood’, as a coherent overarching discourse, and the literal, and often tense, negotiations which characterise the processes of ‘fathering’ and the various identities of ‘fathers’. These negotiations may well be present in the representational realm, as they are in the discourse of academia, through the ambiguity which characterises the representations discussed. A symbolic ideal of the

meaning of fatherhood, based on his privileged position within a patriarchal society, remains, however. These representations therefore represent more than the literal tensions inherent in attempting to create new forms of fathering as a process; they also represent a comment on the increasingly ambiguous position of fatherhood, as a discursive whole, within culture. It is his 'superordinate' position as the exemplary individual of a patriarchal society that often forces fathers to represent the core values of that society that are bound up in an ideal of fatherhood. Once again we see the conflation between the symbolic and the literal within the figure of the father and in the tensions that surround the onscreen father we witness numerous examples of the way in which the father's unique position as a form of masculinity within a discourse in which he is subordinate offers a space in which these values may be questioned. Through the patriarch's inevitable associations with those systems that structure a patriarchal society, any representation of a literal father can be used to offer a critique of these systems of power. As Sean French suggests:

We feel ambivalent about the very word "father" now, just as we do about the language of control; words like authority, law, punishment. In our post-enlightenment language, the notion of authority has been replaced by the notion of oppression. (2)

Just as the word "father" can manufacture ambivalence due to its relation to the notion of oppression, representations of fatherhood are often based on a similar ambivalence, weighed down by the burden of these associations despite the increasing presence of 'nurturing', 'involved' or 'new' forms becoming apparent in academic and popular discourse.

It is this confusion between the literal and the symbolic aspects of fatherhood that accounts for the ambivalent way in which many of the representations of fatherhood that have been analysed have been positioned within the domestic sphere. In situation comedy we have seen the evolution from the a relatively comfortable

patriarch, Jim Anderson in *Father Knows Best*, to the cantankerous Alf Garnett and Archie Bunker, consistently railing against the myriad Others that threatens their once secure position as the marker of universal personhood within a patriarchal society. The difference between the mockery with which these bastions of patriarchal masculinity are greeted and the reverence with which Bill Cosby's affluent, African-American model of fatherhood is treated, in both his on-screen and off-screen personae, only serves to reinforce the inability of the 'superordinate', White male to occupy an unambivalent position as the head of a household within the evolving discourse of the nuclear television family.

Yet the evolution of these sitcom fathers from aggressive, threatening presences to virtual children also demonstrates the role that their positioning within popular discourses of the domestic has had in changing that discourse. Once again, Foucault's conception of the "reflux movement" that placing these peripheral figures at the centre of a discourse to which they should not be central alerts us to the way in which the discourse is changed by their presence. The movement away from representing the father as embodying a reaction to the forces that threaten his once secure position, to representations aligning him with the children of the family shifts the dynamic away from a resistance to change onto a possibility for change. By demonstrating both the necessity and ability for the father to learn to become an integrated part of the domestic sphere, the figure of the childlike father exhibits the total deconstruction of patriarchal power within the home, while also offering the slim possibility that alternative models may become available through the father's education.

The continual reinstatement of a model of family life that excludes a coherent, integrated model of fatherhood, even in those contemporary texts that opt for the

childish or ludicrous model, and base narratives around the father's ability or failure to transcend these limitations, suggests that, despite this possibility for change, it is also possible for this model to bolster the dominant discourse of the nuclear family. As Goffman's analysis of the ludicrous male in print advertising suggests (1979, p.36), there is the potential for this unflattering image of fatherhood to sustain patriarchal power in the real world through providing a flattering comparison with the competency of real males. While the overwhelming prevalence of this form of fatherhood in advertising may suggest that this reading may be a little optimistic for the contemporary context it can still be usefully applied to ensure that we understand the way in which these representations can contribute to maintaining the nuclear status quo.

While the father of the iconic OXO family may be pictured engaged in domestic activities, his patent inability to complete them successfully without supervision, the fact that his undertaking of these tasks is shown to be inherently humorous, and the advert's insistence on demonstrating that this gendered dynamic is being reproduced in the next generation, complicates this demonstration of domestic masculinity. While it is debateable whether his domestic incompetence provides a flattering comparison with that of real men it becomes clear that the advert does reproduce a discourse of the domestic sphere that attempts to exclude the father even as it represents him within it. While male viewers may not experience this as flattering, it does continue to bolster the discourse of separate spheres of experience, figuring the father as uncomfortable with his domestic role and figuring the domestic as both the domain, and the responsibility, of the females in his family.

While it is possible to understand the use of this technique in advertising aimed primarily at an assumed female consumer, we also see a similar reinstatement

of the nuclear family status quo through the image of the childlike father in situation comedy. Ben Porter in *2 Point 4 Children* regularly demonstrates his domestic inadequacy and childish propensity for irresponsibility throughout the series. Like the OXO father, the possibility of creating a new form of domestic masculinity through education and supervision rarely lasts until the end of the narrative, with wife Bill often having to demonstrate her ability to take responsibility for maintaining the family, both domestically and even financially. By playing the notion of learning a new form of masculinity for laughs, both situation comedy and advertising explore a form of masculinity integrated into the domestic discourse of the nuclear family, before ultimately rejecting it as inherently ludicrous.

We can once again return to the ‘canary in the mineshaft’ metaphor to see how these representations demonstrate the shift in discourse away from the Victorian idea of an integrated domestic masculinity identified by John Tosh, to a nuclear family model that excludes men from the domestic almost entirely, can also point towards a moment of discursive flux. John Tosh identifies the prevalence of texts concerning domestic masculinity in the Victorian era as reflective of an anxiety surrounding the climax of this particular model. The *Adam* series’ place within the evolution of the discourse of the nuclear family may well point to the similarly tenuous position of the nuclear family model in popular discourse, in the face of the consistent challenges that its representation has elicited. By representing the separation of gendered spheres of experience as being almost total, later entries in the series create a movement back towards the nuclear model through a representation of the ability to completely remove the masculine from the domestic sphere due to work commitments.

Thankfully, the consistent presence of the father as a “peripheral figure” has also led to an alternative “reflux movement” in the discourse of fatherhood that is

forcing representations of the nuclear family to attempt to more fully integrate masculinity into the domestic, with the reciprocal effect of also attempting to normalise family forms that exist outside of the nuclear model.

As the *Adam* series also demonstrates, the non-nuclear family, with its prioritising of ‘elective affinities’ Beck-Gernsheim (1998) over biological relationships, can actually allow a greater flexibility of representations of domestic masculinity. While Adam shares many characteristics with previous fathers in advertising, such as his discomfort within the domestic sphere and his need for Jane as a supervisory presence, he is also permitted a narrative of growth throughout the series that shows him overcoming these problems. In a key advert, (NAME), he is also explicitly relieved of the burden of embodying the potential impossibility of an integrated domestic masculinity through his flattering comparison with Jane’s ex-husband and the children’s biological father.

The meeting of these two differing models of father dramatises the series’ attempt to move beyond a representation of fatherhood that replicates the same discourse of masculine incompetence, attempting to resist returning the family to the nuclear status quo at the end of every advert by demonstrating the ultimate logic of the exclusion of the masculine from the domestic sphere. The flattering comparison between Adam and the biological father instead serves to integrate Adam more fully into the domestic sphere by demonstrating his relative ease; not only legitimising his place within it but also legitimising the non-nuclear family that has made this a possibility.

The fact that this representation is a result of a commercial impulse should also not be ignored. The *Adam* series not only tries to present a more realistic image of non-nuclear family life so that consumers may more accurately recognise their own

experience within it, but also presents this form of family life as preferable to the more rigid, patriarchal model represented by the biological father. Far from working to bolster the nuclear family as the sole ideal of family life that may be achieved through the use of their product, this series recognises the potential of the non-nuclear unit to provide a more potent metaphor for the act of consumption that it wishes to encourage. In this case it is the process of integrating the interloper into this domestic scenario, rather than rejecting him, that leads to a restoration of a type of nuclear coherence. Through the use of the products advertised Adam is offered the opportunity to develop into a capable father, reflected in the latter entries in the series' focus on solidifying the relationships that define the new family unit. Eventual entries based around the couple's marriage proposal and pregnancy may well create a soap operatic structure, but they also crucially continue a narrative of family development that allows Adam to move beyond his original discomfort and integrate himself into an increasingly solid 'alternative' family unit.

Removing the father from the domestic sphere does not, ultimately, remove the influence of the patriarchal, nuclear model due its replication of the discourse of separate spheres that sustains it. Instead, by integrating the masculine into the domestic, the stubborn conflation of the symbolic patriarch, dependent on his absence, and the literal father, defined by his presence, is properly questioned and alternative forms of family are represented as a real possibility. As the *Adam* series' place within an ongoing evolution of the representation of fatherhood with within the discourse of the family, rather than as a radical break from all that has gone before, attests, this process is the inevitable result of the increasingly impossibility of representing a coherent model of the patriarchal nuclear family as either desirable, or even possible.

By utilising the father to embody the challenges to this model from the very beginning of its representation in popular culture, television has continually presented the viewer with a model of patriarchal fatherhood defined by its antagonistic relationship to the families that they purport to head. By demonstrating the increasingly untenable nature of this model, therefore, it is not only the patriarch that is questioned but also the model of family life that sustains him. As the comparison between old and new forms of fatherhood in the *Adam* series makes clear, it is replacing this outmoded model that creates the combined potential for conceiving and representing alternative forms of family life. By integrating fatherhood into the domestic sphere these representations inevitably foreground fatherhood defined by presence within this sphere, complicating the previous assumption of his patriarchal dominance founded in his absence from it. In this way, by representing the father as comfortable and capable within the domestic sphere these texts form a part of the long discursive movement away from a discourse of family life dominated exclusively by the nuclear model and sustained by the assumption of separate spheres of experience, offering the potential to conceive of more flexible notions of gendered identities for both men and women, inside and outside of the context of the family.

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